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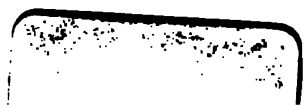

THE SEVEN CARDINAL SINS

AVARICE

"Axe in hand."
Original etching by Adrian Marcel.

"Axe in hand."

Original etching by Adrian Marcel.

Avarice—Anger. Two of the Seven Cardinal Sins. *ILLUSTRATED WITH ETCHINGS BY ADRIAN MARCEL.*

BY EUGENE SUE

BOSTON
FRANCIS A. NICCOLLS & CO.
PUBLISHERS

"Axe in hand."
Original etching by Adrian Marcel.

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER	AVARICE.	PAGE
I.	An Unfortunate Choice	13
II.	A Touching Example of Unselfish Devotion	25
III.	A Shameful Deception	36
IV.	The Voice of the Tempter	46
V.	Father and Son	57
VI.	A Father's Ambition	65
VII.	The Forged Letter	72
VIII.	A Startling Discovery	78
IX.	Commandant de la Miraudière's Antecedents	86
X.	The Mystery Explained	97
XI.	Hidden Treasure	106
XII.	A Voice from the Grave	113
XIII.	The Miser Extolled	118
XIV.	Plans for the Future	122
XV.	Madame Lacombe's Unconditional Surrender	126
XVI.	A Capricious Beauty	132
XVII.	The Hôtel Saint-Ramon	139
XVIII.	A Novel Entertainment	146

CHAPTER		PAGE
XIX.	A Change of Owners	152
XX.	The Return	159
XXI.	The Awakening	166

ANGER.

I.	The Duel	177
II.	Another Ebullition of Temper	186
III.	The Warning	194
IV.	"Those Whom the Gods Destroy They First Make Mad"	199
V.	Deadly Enmity	208
VI.	A Cunning Scheme	217
VII.	Home Pleasures	225
VIII.	The Captain's Narrative	234
IX.	Conclusion of the Captain's Narrative	240
X.	Segoffin's Dissimulation	248
XI.	Sabine's Confession	255
XII.	Suzanne's Enlightenment	265
XIII.	Onésime's Conquest	271
XIV.	Arguments For and Against	279
XV.	An Unwelcome Visitor	287
XVI.	Segoffin's Ruse	294
XVII.	The Voice of the Tempter	302
XVIII.	"My Mother's Murderer Still Lives!"	309
XIX.	After the Storm	316
XX.	The Midnight Attack	322
XXI.	A Last Appeal	329
XXII.	Conclusion	338

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

	PAGE
"AXE IN HAND"	*Frontispiece*
"'GO AWAY AND LET ME ALONE'"	58
"'MY STAR HAS NOT DESERTED ME'"	155
"SEVERAL MEN RUSHED UPON HIM	236

THE MILLIONAIRES

AVARICE.

CHAPTER I.

AN UNFORTUNATE CHOICE.

THE narrow street known for many long years as the Charnier des Innocents (the Charnel-house of the Innocents), near the market, has always been noted for the large number of scriveners who have established their booths in this densely populated part of Paris.

One fine morning in the month of May, 18—, a young girl about eighteen years of age, who was clad in working dress, and whose charming though melancholy face wore that peculiar pallor which seems to be a sort of sinister reflection of poverty, was walking thoughtfully down the Charnier des Innocents. Several times she paused as if in doubt in front of as many scriveners' booths, but either because the proprietors seemed too young or too unprepossessing in appearance or too busy, she went slowly on again.

Seeing, in the doorway of the last booth, an old man with a face as good and kind as it was venerable, the young girl did not hesitate to enter the modest little establishment.

The scrivener, struck in his turn by the young girl's remarkable beauty and modest bearing, as well as her timid and melancholy air, greeted her with almost pater-

nal affability as she entered his shop, after which he closed the door; then drawing the curtain of the little window, the good man motioned his client to a seat, while he took possession of his old leather armchair.

Mariette — for that was the young girl's name — lowered her big blue eyes, blushed deeply, and maintained an embarrassed, almost painful, silence for several seconds. Her bosom rose and fell tumultuously under the small gray shawl that she wore over her faded calico gown, while the hands she had clasped in her lap trembled violently.

The old scrivener, anxious to reassure the poor girl, said to her, almost affectionately, "Come, come, my child, compose yourself. Why should you feel this embarrassment? You came to ask me to write some request or petition for you, or, perhaps, a letter, did you not?"

"Yes, monsieur, it was — it was to ask you to write a letter for me that I came."

"Then you do not know how to write?"

"No, monsieur," replied Mariette, blushing still more deeply, as if ashamed of her ignorance, whereupon the scrivener, regretting that he had thus humiliated his client, said, kindly:

"You certainly cannot suppose me capable of blaming you for your ignorance. On the contrary, it is a sincere compassion I feel for persons who, for want of an education, are compelled to come to me, to apply to a third party, who may betray their confidence, and, perhaps, even ridicule them! And yet they are compelled to confide their dearest and most secret thoughts to these strangers. It is very hard, is it not?"

"It is, indeed, monsieur," replied Mariette, touched by these words. "To be obliged to apply to a stranger to — "

The young girl did not finish the sentence, but blushed deeply, and her eyes filled with tears.

Gazing at his youthful client with even greater interest, the scrivener said:

"Do not be so troubled, my child. You have neither garrulousness nor ridicule to fear from me. I have always regarded as something indescribably touching and sacred the confidence which persons who have been deprived of the advantages of an education are obliged to repose in me."

Then, with a kindly smile, he added: "But pray do not suppose for one moment, mademoiselle, that I say this to glorify myself at the expense of my *confreres*, and to get their clients away from them. No, I am saying exactly what I think and feel; and at my age, one certainly may be allowed to do that."

Mariette, more and more surprised at the old man's words, said, gratefully:

"I thank you, monsieur; you relieve me very much by thus understanding and excusing my embarrassment. It is very hard not to know how to read and write," she added, sighing, "but, alas! very often one cannot help it."

"I am sure, my poor child, that in your case, as in the case of many other young girls who apply to me, it is not the good-will but the opportunity that is lacking. Many of these young girls, from being obliged to take care of their young brothers and sisters while their parents are busy away from home, have had no chance to attend school. Others were apprenticed at an early age —"

"Like myself, monsieur," said Mariette, smiling. "I was apprenticed when I was only nine years old, and up to that time I had been obliged to remain at home and take care of a little brother, who died a short time before my father and mother."

"Poor child! your history is very similar to that of most young girls of your station in life. But, since your term of apprenticeship expired, have you made no effort to acquire a little education?"

"Since that time I have had to work all day and far into the night to earn enough to keep my godmother and myself alive, monsieur," said Mariette, sadly.

"Alas! yes, time is bread to the labourer, and only too often he has to choose whether he shall die of hunger or live in ignorance."

Then, becoming more and more interested, he added: "You spoke of your godmother just now; so your father and mother are both dead, I suppose?"

"Yes, as I told you a little while ago," replied Mariette, sadly. "But pardon me, monsieur, for taking up so much of your time instead of telling you at once what I want you to write for me."

"I am sure my time could not have been better spent, for I am an old man, and I have had a good deal of experience, and I feel sure that you are a good and worthy girl. But now about the letter. Do you prefer to give me a rough idea of what you wish to write and let me put it in my own words, or do you prefer to dictate the letter?"

"I would rather dictate it, monsieur."

"Then I am ready," said the old man, putting on his spectacles, and seating himself at his desk with his eyes fixed upon the paper so as not to increase his client's embarrassment by looking at her.

So, after a moment's hesitation, Mariette, with downcast eyes, proceeded to dictate, as follows:

"Monsieur Louis."

On hearing this name, the old scrivener made a slight movement of surprise, — a fact that was not noticed by Mariette, who repeated, in a less trembling voice this time, "Monsieur Louis."

"I have written that," said the scrivener, still without looking at Mariette, whereupon the latter continued, hesitating every now and then, for, in spite of her confidence in the old man, it was no easy matter to reveal her secret thoughts to him:

"I am greatly troubled, for I have heard nothing from you, though you promised to write me while you were away."

"While you were away," repeated the scrivener, whose face had suddenly become thoughtful, and who was saying to himself, with a vague anxiety: "This is a singular coincidence. His name is Louis, and he is away."

"I hope you are well, M. Louis," Mariette continued, "and that it is not on account of any illness that you have not written to me, for then I should have two causes of anxiety instead of one.

"To-day is the sixth of May, M. Louis, the sixth of May, so I could not let the day pass without writing to you. Perhaps the same thought will occur to you, and that day after to-morrow I shall receive a letter from you, as you will receive one from me. Then I shall know that it was not on account of forgetfulness or sickness that you have delayed writing to me so long. In that case, how happy I shall be! So I shall wait for day after to-morrow with great impatience. Heaven grant that I may not be disappointed, M. Louis."

Mariette stifled a sigh as she uttered these last words, and a tear rolled down her cheek.

A long pause followed. The features of the scrivener who was bending over his desk could not be seen by the young girl, but they were assuming a more and more anxious expression; and two or three times he tried to steal a furtive glance at his client, as if the interest he had felt in her had given place to a sort of distrust caused by grave apprehensions on his part.

The young woman, keeping her eyes still fixed upon her lap, continued:

"I have no news to tell you, M. Louis. My godmother is still very ill. Her sufferings seem to increase, and that renders her much more irritable. In order that I may be with her as much as possible, I sew at home now most of the time, instead of going to Madame Jourdan's,

so the days seem long and gloomy; for the work done in the shop with my companions was almost a pleasure, and seemed to progress much more rapidly. So I am obliged to work far into the night now, and do not get much sleep, as my godmother suffers much more at night than in the daytime, and requires a great deal of attention from me. Sometimes I do not even wake when she calls me because I am so dead with sleep, and then she scolds, which is very natural when she suffers so.

"You can understand, of course, that my life at home is not very happy, and that a friendly word from you would be a great comfort, and console me for many things that are very unpleasant.

"Good-bye, M. Louis. I expected to have written to you through Augustine, but she has gone back to her home now, and I have been obliged to apply to another person, to whom I have dictated this letter. Ah, M. Louis, never have I realised the misfortune of not knowing how to read or write as much as I do at this present time.

"Farewell, M. Louis, think of me, I beg of you, for I am always thinking of you.

"With sincere affection I once more bid you adieu."

As the young girl remained silent for a minute or two after these words, the old man turned to her and asked:

"Is that all, my child?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"And what name is to be signed to this letter?"

"The name of Mariette, monsieur."

"Mariette only?"

"Mariette Moreau, if you think best, monsieur. That is my family name."

"Signed, Mariette Moreau," said the old man, writing the name as he spoke.

Then, having folded the letter, he asked, concealing the secret anxiety with which he awaited the girl's reply:

"To whom is this letter to be addressed, my child?"

"To M. Louis Richard. General delivery, Dreux."

"I thought as much," secretly groaned the old man, as he prepared to write the address Mariette had just given him.

If the young girl had not been so deeply preoccupied she could hardly have failed to notice the change in the expression of the scrivener's face, — a change which became still more noticeable when he discovered for a certainty for whom this missive was intended. It was with a look of positive anger now that he furtively watched Mariette, and he seemed unable to make up his mind to write the address she had just given him, for after having written upon the envelope the words, "To Monsieur," he dropped his pen, and said to his client, forcing a smile in order to conceal alike his resentment and his apprehensions:

"Now, my child, though this is the first time we ever saw each other, it seems to me you feel you can trust me a little already."

"That is true, monsieur. Before I came here, I feared I should not have the courage to dictate my letter to an entire stranger, but your manner was so kind that I soon got over my embarrassment."

"I certainly see no reason why you should feel the slightest embarrassment. If I were your own father, I could not find a word of fault with the letter you have just written to — to M. Louis, and if I were not afraid of abusing the confidence you say that you have in me, I should ask — but no, that would be too inquisitive."

"You would ask me what, monsieur?"

"Who this M. Louis Richard is?"

"That is no secret, monsieur. M. Louis is the clerk of a notary whose office is in the same building as the shop in which I work. It was in this way that we became acquainted on the sixth of May, just one year ago to-day."

"Ah! I understand now why you laid such stress upon that date in your letter."

"Yes, monsieur."

"And you love each other, I suppose, — don't blush so, child, — and expect to marry some day, probably?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"And M. Louis's family consents to the marriage?"

"M. Louis has no one but his father to consult, and we hope he will not refuse his consent."

"And the young man's father, what kind of a person is he?"

"The best of fathers, M. Louis says, and bears his present poverty with great courage and cheerfulness, though he used to be very well off. M. Louis and his father are as poor now, though, as my godmother and I are. That makes us hope that he will not oppose our marriage."

"And your godmother, my child, — it seems to me she must be a great trial to you."

"When one suffers all the time, and has never had anything but misfortunes all one's life, it is very natural that one should not be very sweet tempered."

"Your godmother is an invalid, then?"

"She has lost one of her hands, monsieur, and she has a lung trouble that has confined her to the bed for more than a year."

"Lost her hand, — how?"

"She used to work in a mattress factory, monsieur, and one day she ran a long, crooked needle into her hand. The wound became inflamed from want of care, for my godmother had not time to give it the attention it should have had, and the doctors were obliged to cut her arm off. The wound reopens now and then, and causes her a great deal of pain."

"Poor woman!" murmured the scrivener, absently.

"As for the lung trouble she has," continued Mariette, "many women who follow that trade contract the disease,

the doctors say, from breathing the unwholesome dust from the old mattresses they make over. My godmother is bent almost double, and nearly every night she has such terrible fits of coughing that I have to hold her for hours, sometimes."

"And your godmother has nothing but your earnings to depend on?"

"She cannot work now, monsieur, of course."

"Such devotion on your part is very generous, I must say."

"I am only doing my duty, monsieur. My godmother took care of me after my parents died, and paid for a three years' apprenticeship for me. But for her, I should not be in a position to earn my living, so it is only right that she should profit now by the assistance she gave me years ago."

"But you must have to work very hard to support her and yourself?"

"Yes; I have to work from fifteen to eighteen hours a day, monsieur."

"And at night you have to nurse her instead of taking the rest you so much need?"

"Who else would nurse her, monsieur?"

"But why doesn't she try to get into some hospital?"

"They will not take her into a hospital because the lung trouble she has is incurable. Besides, I could not desert her like that."

"Ah, well, my child, I see that I was not mistaken. You are a good, noble-hearted girl, there is no doubt of it," added the old man, holding out his hand to Mariette.

As he did, either through awkwardness, or intentionally, the scrivener overturned the inkstand that stood on his desk in such a way that a good part of the contents ran over the letter, which lacked only the address to complete it.

"Good heavens! How unfortunate, the letter is covered with ink, monsieur!" exclaimed Mariette.

"How awkward in me!" responded the old man, with a disgusted air. "Still, it doesn't matter very much, after all. It was a short letter. I write very rapidly, and it will not take me more than ten minutes to copy it for you, my child. At the same time, I will read it aloud so you can see if there is any change you would like to make in it."

"I am truly sorry to give you so much trouble, monsieur."

"It serves me right, as it was all my fault," responded the old man, cheerfully.

And he began to read the letter aloud as he wrote, exactly as if he were recopying it, as he proceeded with the reading. Nevertheless, from the scrivener's manner it seemed evident that a violent struggle was going on in his breast, for sometimes he sighed and knit his brows, sometimes he seemed confused and kept his eyes sedulously averted from the ingenuous face of Mariette, who sat with one elbow resting upon the table, and her head supported on her hand, watching with envious eyes the rapid movements of the old man's pen, as it traced characters which were undecipherable to her, but which would, as she fondly supposed, convey her thoughts to the man she loved.

The young girl expressing no desire to make the slightest change in her artless missive, the scrivener handed it to her after having carefully sealed it.

"And now, monsieur, how much do I owe you?" timidly inquired the girl, drawing a little purse containing two small silver coins and a few sous from her pocket.

"Fifty centimes," replied the old man after a moment's hesitation, remembering, perhaps, that it was at the cost of a day's bread that the poor girl was writing to her lover; "fifty centimes," repeated the scrivener, "for you

understand, of course, my child, that I expect you to pay for only one of the letters I have written. I alone am responsible for my awkwardness."

"You are certainly very honest, monsieur," said Mariette, touched by what she considered a proof of generosity on the part of the scrivener. Then, after having paid for her letter, she added:

"You have been so kind to me, monsieur, that I shall venture to ask a favour of you."

"Speak, my child."

"If I have any other letters to write, it would be almost impossible for me to apply to any one but you, monsieur."

"I shall be at your service."

"But this is not all, monsieur. My godmother is as I am. She can neither read nor write. I had a friend I could depend upon, but she is out of town. In case I should receive a letter from M. Louis, would you be kind enough to read it to me?"

"Certainly, my child. I will read your letters to you with pleasure. Bring them all to me," replied the old man, with much inward gratification. "It is I who should thank you for the confidence you manifest in me. I hope I shall soon see you again, and that you leave here much more easy in mind than when you came."

"I certainly could not expect such kindness as you have shown me from any one else."

"Farewell, then, my child, and be sure that you consider me your reader and secretary henceforth. It really seems as if we must have known each other a dozen years."

"That is true, monsieur. *Au revoir.*"

"*Au revoir*, my child."

Mariette had hardly left the booth when a postman appeared in the doorway, and holding out a letter to the old scrivener, said, cordially:

"Here, Father Richard, is a letter from Dreux."

"A letter from Dreux!" exclaimed the old man, seizing it eagerly. "Thank you, my friend." Then, examining the handwriting, he said to himself: "It is from Ramon! What is he going to tell me? What does he think of my son? Ah! what is going to become of all the fine plans Ramon and I formed so long ago?"

"There are six sous to pay on it, Father Richard," said the postman, arousing the old scrivener from his reverie.

"Six sous! the devil! isn't it prepaid?"

"Look at the stamp, Father Richard."

"True," said the scrivener, sighing heavily, as he reluctantly drew the ten sous piece he had just received from his pocket and handed it to the postman.

While this was going on, Mariette was hastening homeward.

CHAPTER II.

A TOUCHING EXAMPLE OF UNSELFISH DEVOTION.

MARIETTE soon reached the gloomy and sombre thoroughfare known as the Rue des Prêtres St. Germain-l'Auxerrois, and entered one of the houses opposite the grim walls of the church. After traversing a dark alley, the girl began to climb a rickety stairway as dark as the alley itself, for the only light came through a courtyard so narrow that it reminded one of a well.

The porter's room was on the first landing only a few steps from the stairway, and Mariette, pausing there, said to the woman who occupied it:

"Madame Justin, did you have the goodness to go up and see if my godmother wanted anything?"

"Yes, Mlle. Mariette, I took her milk up to her, but she was in such a bad humour that she treated me like a dog. Had it not been for obliging you, I would have let the old crosspatch alone, I can tell you."

"You must not be too hard on her, Madame Justin; she suffers so much."

"Oh, you are always making excuses for her, I know. It shows how good-hearted you are, but it doesn't prevent your godmother from being a hateful old thing. Poor child, you certainly are having your purgatory in advance. If there is no paradise for you hereafter you will certainly be cheated out of your rightful dues. But wait a minute, I have a letter for you."

"A letter?" exclaimed Mariette, her heart throbbing

with relief and hope, "a letter from some one out of the city?"

"Yes, mademoiselle, it is postmarked Dreux, and there are six sous to pay on it. Here it is, and see, on the corner of the envelope the writer has put the words, 'Very urgent.'"

Mariette seized the letter and slipped it into her bosom; then, drawing out her little purse again, she took from it her last ten sous piece and paid the woman, after which she hastened up to her room, pleased and at the same time anxious and sad; pleased at having received a letter from Louis, anxious concerning the significance of those words, "Very urgent," written in a corner of the envelope, and sad because several hours must elapse before she would know the contents of the letter, for she dared not absent herself again after having left her godmother alone so long.

It was with a sort of dread that she finally opened the door of the room on the fifth floor that she occupied with her godmother. The poor woman was lying on the only bed the two women possessed. A thin mattress now rolled up out of the way in a corner, but laid on the floor at night, served as a bed for Mariette. A table, an old bureau, two chairs, a few cooking utensils hanging on the wall near the fireplace, were the only articles of furniture in the dimly lighted room, but everything was scrupulously clean.

Madame Lacombe — for that was the invalid's name — was a tall, frightfully pale, and emaciated woman, about fifty years of age, with a peevish, disagreeable face. Bent nearly double in the bed, one could see of her only her mutilated arm swathed in bandages, and her irascible face, surrounded by an old cap from which a wisp of gray hair crept out here and there, while her bluish lips were continually distorted by a bitter and sardonic smile.

Madame Lacombe seemed to be suffering greatly. At

all events she was in an execrable temper, and her hollow eyes gleamed ominously. Making an effort to turn herself in bed, so as to get a look at her godchild, she exclaimed, wrathfully:

"Where on earth have you been all this time, you gadabout?"

"I have been gone barely an hour, godmother."

"And you hoped to find me dead when you got back, didn't you, now? Oh, you needn't deny it. You've had enough of me, yes, too much. The day my coffin lid is screwed down will be a happy day for you, and for me, too, for it is too bad, too bad for any one to have to suffer as I do," added the poor woman, pressing her hand upon her bosom, and groaning heavily.

Mariette dried the tears her godmother's sarcastic words had excited, and approaching the sufferer, said, gently:

"You had such a bad night last night that I hoped you would be more comfortable to-day and get a little sleep while I was out."

"If I suffer or if I starve to death it makes no difference to you, evidently, provided you can run the streets."

"I went out this morning because I was absolutely obliged to, godmother, but before I left I asked Madame Justin —"

"I'd as lief see a death's-head as that creature, so when you want to get rid of me you have only to send her to wait on me."

"Shall I dress your arm, godmother?"

"No, it is too late for that now. You stayed away on purpose. I know you did."

"I am sorry I was late, but won't you let me dress it now?"

"I wish to heaven you would leave me in peace."

"But your arm will get worse if you don't have it dressed."

"And that is exactly what you want."

"Oh, godmother, don't say that, I beg of you."

"Don't come near me! I won't have it dressed, I say."

"Very well, godmother," replied the girl, sighing. Then she added, "I asked Madame Justin to bring up your milk. Here it is. Would you like me to warm it a little?"

"Milk? milk? I'm tired of milk! The very thought of it makes me sick at my stomach. The doctor said I was to have good strong bouillon, with a chop and a bit of chicken now and then. I had some Monday and Wednesday — but this is Sunday."

"It is not my fault, godmother. I know the doctor ordered it, but one must have money to follow his directions, and it is almost impossible for me to earn twenty sous a day now."

"You don't mind spending money on clothes, I'm sure. When my comfort is concerned it is a very different thing."

"But I have had nothing but this calico dress all winter, godmother," answered Mariette, with touching resignation. "I economise all I can, and we owe two months' rent for all that."

"That means I am a burden to you, I suppose. And yet I took you in out of the street, and had you taught a trade, you ungrateful, hard-hearted minx!"

"No, godmother, I am not ungrateful. When you are not feeling as badly as you are now you are more just to me," replied Mariette, restraining her tears; "but don't insist upon going without eating any longer. It will make you feel so badly."

"I know it. I've got dreadful cramps in my stomach now."

"Then take your milk, I beg of you, godmother."

"I won't do anything of the kind! I hate milk, I tell you."

"Shall I go out and get you a couple of fresh eggs?"

"No, I want some chicken."

"But, godmother, I can't—"

"Can't what?"

"Buy chicken on credit."

"I only want a half or a quarter of one. You had twenty-four sous in your purse this morning."

"That is true, godmother."

"Then go to the *rotisseur* and buy me a quarter of a chicken."

"But, godmother, I—"

"Well?"

"I haven't that much money any longer, I have only a few sous left."

"And those two ten sous pieces; what became of them?"

"Godmother—"

"Where are those two ten sous pieces, tell me?"

"I—I don't know," repeated the poor girl, blushing. "They must have slipped out of my purse. I—I—"

"You lie. You are blushing as red as a beet."

"I assure you—"

"Yes, yes, I see," sneered the sick woman, "while I am lying here on my death-bed you have been stuffing yourself with dainties."

"But, godmother—"

"Get out of my sight, get out of my sight, I tell you! Let me lie here and starve if you will, but don't let me ever lay eyes on you again! You were very anxious for me to drink that milk! There was poison in it, I expect, I am such a burden to you."

At this accusation, which was as absurd as it was atrocious, Mariette stood for a moment silent and motionless, not understanding at first the full meaning of those horrible words; but when she did, she recoiled, clasping her hands in positive terror; then, unable to restrain her tears, and yielding to an irresistible impulse, she threw herself on the sick woman's neck, twined her arms

around her, and covering her face with tears and kisses, exclaimed, wildly:

"Oh, godmother, godmother, how can you?"

This despairing protest against a charge which could have originated only in a disordered brain restored the invalid to her senses, and, realising the injustice of which she had been guilty, she, too, burst into tears; then taking one of Mariette's hands in one of hers, and trying to press the young girl to her breast with the other, she said, soothingly:

"Come, come, child, don't cry so. What a silly creature you are! Can't you see that I was only joking?"

"True, godmother, I was very stupid to think you could be in earnest," replied Mariette, passing the back of her hand over her eyes to dry her tears, "but really I couldn't help it."

"You ought to have more patience with your poor godmother, Mariette," replied the sick woman, sadly. "When I suffer so it seems as if I can hardly contain myself."

"I know it, I know it, godmother! It is easy enough to be just and amiable when one is happy, while you, poor dear, have never known what happiness is."

"That is true," said the sick woman, feeling a sort of cruel satisfaction in justifying her irritability by an enumeration of her grievances, "that is true. Many persons may have had a lot like mine, but no one ever had a worse one. Beaten as an apprentice, beaten by my husband until he drank himself to death, I have dragged my ball and chain along for fifty years, without ever having known a single happy day."

"Poor godmother, I understand only too well how much you must have suffered."

"No, child, no, you cannot understand, though you have known plenty of trouble in your short life; but you are pretty, and when you have on a fresh white cap, with

a little bow of pink ribbon on your hair, and you look at yourself in the glass, you have a few contented moments, I know."

"But listen, godmother, I — "

"It is some comfort, I tell you. Come, child, be honest now, and admit that you are pleased, and a little proud too, when people turn to look at you, in spite of your cheap frock and your clumsy laced shoes."

"Oh, so far as that is concerned, godmother, I always feel ashamed, somehow, when I see people looking at me. When I used to go to the workroom there was a man who came to see Madame Jourdan, and who was always looking at me, but I just hated it."

"Oh, yes, but for all that it pleases you way down in your secret heart; and when you get old you will have something pleasant to think of, while I have not. I can't even remember that I was ever young, and, so far as looks are concerned, I was always so ugly that I never could bear to look in the glass, and I could get no husband except an old drunkard who used to beat me within an inch of my life. I didn't even have a chance to enjoy myself after his death, either, for I had a big bill at the wine-shop to pay for him. Then, as if I had not trouble enough, I must needs lose my health and become unable to work, so I should have died of starvation, but for you."

"Come, come, godmother, you're not quite just," said Mariette, anxious to dispel Madame Lacombe's ill-humour. "To my certain knowledge, you have had at least one happy day in your life."

"Which day, pray?"

"The day when, at my mother's death, you took me into your home out of charity."

"Well?"

"Well, did not the knowledge that you had done such a noble deed please you? Wasn't that a happy day for you, godmother?"

"You call that a happy day, do you? On the contrary it was one of the very worst days I ever experienced."

"Why, godmother?" exclaimed the girl, reproachfully.

"It was, for my good-for-nothing husband having died, as soon as his debts were paid I should have had nobody to think of but myself; but after I took you, it was exactly the same as if I were a widow with a child to support, and that is no very pleasant situation for a woman who finds it all she can do to support herself. But you were so cute and pretty with your curly head and big blue eyes, and you looked so pitiful kneeling beside your mother's coffin, that I hadn't the heart to let you go to the Foundling Asylum. What a night I spent asking myself what I should do about you, and what would become of you if I should get out of work. If I had been your own mother, Mariette, I couldn't have been more worried, and here you are talking about that having been a happy day for me. No; if I had been well off, it would have been very different! I should have said to myself: 'There is no danger, the child will be provided for.' But to take a child without any hope of bettering its condition is a very serious thing."

"Poor godmother!" said the young girl, deeply affected. Then smiling through her tears in the hope of cheering the sick woman, she added:

"Ah, well, we won't talk of days, then, but of moments, for I'm going to convince you that you have at least been happy for that brief space of time, as at this present moment, for instance."

"This present moment?"

"Yes, I'm sure you must be pleased to see that I have stopped crying, thanks to the kind things you have been saying to me."

But the sick woman shook her head sadly.

"When I get over a fit of ill-temper like that I had

just now, do you know what I say to myself?" she asked.

"What is it, godmother?"

"I say to myself: 'Mariette is a good girl, I know, but I am always so disagreeable and unjust to her that way down in the depths of her heart she must hate me, and I deserve it.'"

"Come, come, godmother, why will you persist in dwelling upon that unpleasant subject, godmother?" said the girl, reproachfully.

"You must admit that I am right, and I do not say this in any faultfinding way, I assure you. It would be perfectly natural. You are obliged almost to kill yourself working for me, you nurse me and wait on me, and I repay you with abuse and hard words. My death will, indeed, be a happy release for you, poor child. The sooner the undertaker comes for me, the better."

"You said, just now, that when you were talking of such terrible things it was only in jest, and I take it so now," responded Mariette, again trying to smile, though it made her heart bleed to see the invalid relapsing into this gloomy mood again; but the latter, touched by the grieved expression of the girl's features, said:

"Well, as I am only jesting, don't put on such a solemn look. Come, get out the chafing-dish and make me some milk soup. While the milk is warming, you can dress my arm."

Mariette seemed as pleased with these concessions on the part of her godmother as if the latter had conferred some great favour upon her. Hastening to the cupboard she took from a shelf the last bit of bread left in the house, crumbled it in a saucepan of milk, lighted the lamp under the chafing-dish, and then returned to the invalid, who now yielded the mutilated arm to her ministrations, and in spite of the repugnance which such a wound could not fail to inspire, Mariette dressed it with as much dexterity as patience.

The amiability and devotion of the young girl, as well as her tender solicitude, touched the heart of Madame Lacombe, and when the unpleasant task was concluded, she remarked:

"Talk about Sisters of Charity, there is not one who deserves half as much praise as you do, child."

"Do not say that, godmother. Do not the good sisters devote their lives to caring for strangers, while you are like a mother to me? I am only doing my duty. I don't deserve half as much credit as they do."

"Yes, my poor Mariette, I would talk about my affection for you. It is a delightful thing. I positively made you weep awhile ago, and I shall be sure to do the same thing again to-morrow."

Mariette, to spare herself the pain of replying to her godmother's bitter words, went for the soup, which the invalid seemed to eat with considerable enjoyment after all, for it was not until she came to the last spoonful that she exclaimed:

"But now I think of it, child, what are you going to eat?"

"Oh, I have already breakfasted, godmother," replied the poor little deceiver. "I bought a roll this morning, and ate it as I walked along. But let me arrange your pillow for you. You may drop off to sleep, perhaps, you had such a bad night."

"But you were awake even more than I was."

"Nonsense! I am no sleepyhead, and being kept awake a little doesn't hurt me. There, don't you feel more comfortable now?"

"Yes, very much. Thank you, my child."

"Then I will take my work and sit over there by the window. It is so dark to-day, and my work is particular."

"What are you making?"

"Such an exquisite chemise of the finest linen lawn, godmother. Madame Jourdan told me I must be very careful with it. The lace alone I am to put on it is

worth two hundred francs, which will make the cost of each garment at least three hundred francs, and there are two dozen of them to be made. They are for some kept woman, I believe," added Mariette, naïvely.

The sick woman gave a sarcastic laugh.

"What are you laughing at, godmother?" inquired the girl, in surprise.

"A droll idea that just occurred to me."

"And what was it, godmother?" inquired Mariette, rather apprehensively, for she knew the usual character of Madame Lacombe's pleasantries.

"I was thinking how encouraging it was to virtue that an honest girl like yourself, who has only two or three patched chemises to her back, should be earning twenty sous a day by making three hundred franc chemises for — Oh, well, work away, child, I'll try to dream of a rest from my sufferings."

And the sick woman turned her face to the wall and said no more.

Fortunately, Mariette was too pure-hearted, and too preoccupied as well, to feel the bitterness of her godmother's remark, and when the sick woman turned her back upon her the girl drew the very urgent letter the portress had given her from her bosom, and laid it in her lap where she could gaze at it now and then as she went on with her sewing.

CHAPTER III.

A SHAMEFUL DECEPTION.

DISCOVERING, a little while afterward, that her godmother was asleep, Mariette, who up to that time had kept the letter from Louis Richard — the scrivener's only son — carefully concealed in her lap, broke the seal and opened the missive. An act of vain curiosity on her part, for, as we have said, the poor girl could not read. But it was a touching sight to see her eagerly gaze at these, to her, incomprehensible characters.

She perceived with a strange mingling of anxiety and hope that the letter was very short. But did this communication, which was marked "Very urgent" on a corner of the envelope, contain good or bad news?

Mariette, with her eyes riveted upon these hieroglyphics, lost herself in all sorts of conjectures, rightly thinking that so short a letter after so long a separation must contain something of importance, — either an announcement of a speedy return, or bad news which the writer had not time to explain in full.

Under these circumstances, poor Mariette experienced one of the worst of those trials to which persons who have been deprived of the advantages of even a rudimentary education are exposed. To hold in one's hand lines that may bring you either joy or sorrow, and yet be unable to learn the secret! To be obliged to wait until you can ask a stranger to read these lines and until you can hear from other lips the news upon which your very life depends, — is this not hard?

At last this state of suspense became so intolerable that, seeing her godmother continued to sleep, she resolved, even at the risk of being cruelly blamed on her return, — for Madame Lacombe's good-natured fits were rare, — to hasten back to the scrivener; so she cautiously rose from her chair so as not to wake the sick woman, and tiptoed to the door, but just as she reached it a bitter thought suddenly checked her.

She could not have the scrivener read her letter without asking him to reply to it. At least it was more than probable that the contents of the letter would necessitate an immediate reply, consequently she would be obliged to pay the old man, and Mariette no longer possessed even sufficient money to buy bread for the day, and the baker, to whom she already owed twenty francs, would positively refuse, she knew, to trust her further. Her week's earnings which had only amounted to five francs, as her godmother had taken up so much of her time, had been nearly all spent in paying a part of the rent and the washerwoman, leaving her, in fact, only twenty-five sous, most of which had been used in defraying the expenses of her correspondence with Louis, an extravagance for which the poor child now reproached herself in view of her godmother's pressing needs.

One may perhaps smile at the harsh recriminations to which she had been subjected on account of this trifling expenditure, but, alas! twenty sous does not seem a trifling sum to the poor, an increase or decrease of that amount in their daily or even weekly earnings often meaning life or death, sickness or health, to the humble toiler for daily bread.

To save further expense, Mariette thought for a moment of asking the portress to read the letter for her, but the poor girl was so shy and sensitive, and feared the rather coarse, though good-natured woman's raillery so much, that she finally decided she would rather make almost any sacrifice than apply to her. She had one quite

pretty dress which she had bought at a second-hand clothes store and refitted for herself, a dress which she kept for great occasions and which she had worn the few times she had gone on little excursions with Louis. With a heavy sigh, she placed the dress, together with a small silk fichu, in a basket to take it to the pawnbroker; and with the basket in her hand, and walking very cautiously so as not to wake her godmother, the girl approached the door, but just as she again reached it Madame Lacombe made a slight movement, and murmured, drowsily:

"She's going out again, I do believe, and —"

But she fell asleep again without finishing the sentence.

Mariette stood for a moment silent and motionless, then opening the door with great care she stole out, locking it behind her and removing the key, which she left in the porter's room as she passed. She then hastened to the Mont de Piété, where they loaned her fifty sous on her dress and fichu, and, armed with this money, Mariette flew back to the Charnier des Innocents to find the scrivener.

Since Mariette's departure, and particularly since he had read the letter received from Dreux that morning, the old man had been reflecting with increasing anxiety on the effect this secret which he had discovered by the merest chance would have upon certain projects of his own. He was thus engaged when he saw the same young girl suddenly reappear at the door of his shop, whereupon, without concealing his surprise, though he did not betray the profound uneasiness his client's speedy return caused him, the scrivener said:

"What is it, my child? I did not expect you back so soon."

"Here is a letter from M. Louis, sir," said the young girl, drawing the precious missive from her bosom, "and I have come to ask you to read it to me."

Trembling with anxiety and curiosity, the girl waited as the scrivener glanced over the brief letter, concealing with only a moderate degree of success the genuine consternation its contents excited; then, uttering an exclamation of sorrowful indignation, he, to Mariette's intense bewilderment and dismay, tore the precious letter in several pieces.

"Poor child! poor child!" he exclaimed, throwing the fragments under his desk, after having crumpled them in his hands.

"What are you doing, monsieur?" cried Mariette, pale as death.

"Ah, my poor child!" repeated the old man, with an air of deep compassion.

"Good heavens! Has any misfortune befallen M. Louis?" murmured the girl, clasping her hands imploringly.

"No, my child, no; but you must forget him."

"Forget him?"

"Yes; believe me, it would be much better for you to renounce all hope, so far as he is concerned."

"My God! What has happened to him?"

"There are some things that are much harder to bear than ignorance, and yet I was pitying you a little while ago because you could not read."

"But what did he say in the letter, monsieur?"

"Your marriage is no longer to be thought of."

"Did M. Louis say that?"

"Yes, at the same time appealing to your generosity of heart."

"M. Louis bids me renounce him, and says he renounces me?"

"Alas! yes, my poor child. Come, come, summon up all your courage and resignation."

Mariette, who had turned as pale as death, was silent for a moment, while big tears rolled down her cheeks; then, stooping suddenly, she gathered up the crumpled

fragments of the letter and handed them to the scrivener, saying, in a husky voice:

"I at least have the courage to hear all. Put the pieces together and read the letter to me, if you please, monsieur."

"Do not insist, my child, I beg of you."

"Read it, monsieur, in pity read it!"

"But —"

"I must know the contents of this letter, however much the knowledge may pain me."

"I have already told you the substance of it. Spare yourself further pain."

"Have pity on me, monsieur. If you do really feel the slightest interest in me, read the letter to me, — in heaven's name, read it! Let me at least know the extent of my misfortune; besides, there may be a line, or at least a word, of consolation."

"Well, my poor child, as you insist," said the old man, adjusting the fragments of the letter, while Mariette watched him with despairing eyes, "listen to the letter."

And he read as follows:

"'My dear Mariette: — I write you a few lines in great haste. My soul is full of despair, for we shall be obliged to renounce our hopes. My father's comfort and peace of mind, in his declining years, must be assured at any cost. You know how devotedly I love my father. I have given my word, and you and I must never meet again.

"'One last request. I appeal both to your delicacy and generosity of heart. Make no attempt to induce me to change this resolution. I have been obliged to choose between my father and you; perhaps if I should see you again, I might not have the courage to do my duty as a son. My father's future is, consequently, in your hands. I rely upon your generosity. Farewell! Grief over-

powers me so completely that I can no longer hold my pen.

"'Once more, and for ever, farewell.

"'LOUIS.'"

While this note was being read, Mariette might have served as a model for a statue of grief. Standing motionless beside the scrivener's desk, with inertly hanging arms, and clasped hands, her downcast eyes swimming with tears, and her lips agitated by a convulsive trembling, the poor creature still seemed to be listening, long after the old man had concluded his reading.

He was the first to break the long silence that ensued.

"I felt certain that this letter would pain you terribly, my dear child," he said, compassionately.

But Mariette made no reply.

"Do not tremble so, my child," continued the scrivener. "Sit down; and here, take a sip of water."

But Mariette did not even hear him. With her tear-dimmed eyes still fixed upon vacancy, she murmured, with a heart-broken expression on her face:

"So it is all over! There is nothing left for me in the world. It was too blissful a dream. I am like my godmother, happiness is not for such as me."

"My child," pleaded the old man, touched, in spite of himself, by her despair, "my child, don't give way so, I beg of you."

The words seemed to recall the girl to herself. She wiped her eyes, then, gathering up the pieces of the torn letter, she said, in a voice she did her best to steady:

"Thank you, monsieur."

"What are you doing?" asked Father Richard, anxiously. "What is the use of preserving these fragments of a letter which will awaken such sad memories?"

"The grave of a person one has loved also awakens sad memories," replied Mariette, with a bitter smile, "and yet one does not desert that grave."

After she had collected all the scraps of paper in the envelope, Mariette replaced it in her bosom, and, crossing her little shawl upon her breast, turned to go, saying, sadly: "I thank you for your kindness, monsieur;" then, as if bethinking herself, she added, timidly:

"Though this letter requires no reply, monsieur, after all the trouble I have given you, I feel that I ought to offer —"

"My charge is ten sous, exactly the same as for a letter," replied the old man, promptly, accepting and pocketing the remuneration with unmistakable eagerness, in spite of the conflicting emotions which had agitated him ever since the young girl's return. "And now *au revoir*, my child," he said, in a tone of evident relief; "our next meeting, I hope, will be under happier circumstances."

"Heaven grant it, monsieur," replied Mariette, as she walked slowly away, while Father Richard, evidently anxious to return home, closed the shutters of his stall, thus concluding his day's work much earlier than usual.

Mariette, a prey to the most despairing thoughts, walked on and on mechanically, wholly unconscious of the route she was following, until she reached the Pont au Change. At the sight of the river she started suddenly like one awaking from a dream, and murmured, "It was my evil genius that brought me here."

In another moment she was leaning over the parapet gazing down eagerly into the swift flowing waters below. Gradually, as her eyes followed the course of the current, a sort of vertigo seized her. Unconsciously, too, she was slowly yielding to the fascination such a scene often exerts, and, with her head supported on her hands, she leaned farther and farther over the stream.

"I could find forgetfulness there," the poor child said to herself. "The river is a sure refuge from misery, from hunger, from sickness, or from a miserable old age, an old age like that of my poor godmother.

My godmother? Why, without me, what would become of her?"

Just then Mariette felt some one seize her by the arm, at the same time exclaiming, in a frightened tone:

"Take care, my child, take care, or you will fall in the river."

The girl turned her haggard eyes upon the speaker, and saw a stout woman with a kind and honest face, who continued, almost affectionately:

"You are very imprudent to lean so far over the parapet, my child. I expected to see you fall over every minute."

"I was not noticing, madame —"

"But you ought to notice, child. Good Heavens! how pale you are! Do you feel sick?"

"No, only a little weak, madame. It is nothing. I shall soon be all right again."

"Lean on me. You are just recovering from a fit of illness, I judge."

"Yes, madame," replied Mariette, passing her hand across her forehead. "Will you tell me where I am, please?"

"Between the Pont Neuf and the Pont au Change, my dear. You are a stranger in Paris, perhaps."

"No, madame, but I had an attack of dizziness just now. It is passing off, and I see where I am now."

"Wouldn't you like me to accompany you to your home, child?" asked the stout woman, kindly. "You are trembling like a leaf. Here, take my arm."

"I thank you, madame, but it is not necessary. I live only a short distance from here."

"Just as you say, child, but I'll do it with pleasure if you wish. No? Very well, good luck to you, then."

And the obliging woman continued on her way.

Mariette, thus restored to consciousness, as it were, realised the terrible misfortune that had befallen her all

the more keenly, and to this consciousness was now added the fear of being cruelly reproached by her godmother just at a time when she was so sorely in need of consolation, or at least of the quiet and solitude that one craves after such a terrible shock.

Desiring to evade the bitter reproaches this long absence was almost sure to bring down upon her devoted head, and remembering the desire her godmother had expressed that morning, Mariette hoped to gain forgiveness by gratifying the invalid's whim, so, with the forty sous left of the amount she had obtained at the Mont de Piété still in her pocket, she hastened to a *rôtisseur's*, and purchased a quarter of a chicken there, thence to a bakery, where she bought a couple of crisp white rolls, after which she turned her steps homeward.

A handsome coupé was standing at the door of the house in which Mariette lived, though she did not even notice this fact, but when she stopped at the porter's room as usual, to ask for her key, Madame Justin exclaimed:

"Your key, Mlle. Mariette? Why, that gentleman called for it a moment ago."

"What gentleman?"

"A decorated gentleman. Yes, I should say he was decorated. Why, the ribbon in his buttonhole was at least two inches wide. I never saw a person with such a big decoration."

"But I am not acquainted with any decorated gentleman," replied the young girl, much surprised. "He must have made a mistake."

"Oh, no, child. He asked me if the Widow Lacombe didn't live here with her goddaughter, a seamstress, so you see there could be no mistake."

"But didn't you tell the gentleman that my godmother was an invalid and could not see any one?"

"Yes, child, but he said he must have a talk with her

on a very important matter, all the same, so I gave him the key, and let him go up."

"I will go and see who it is, Madame Justin," responded Mariette.

Imagine her astonishment, when, on reaching the fifth floor, she saw the stranger through the half-open door, and heard him address these words to Madame Lacombe:

"As your goddaughter has gone out, my good woman, I can state my business with you very plainly."

When these words reached her ears, Mariette, yielding to a very natural feeling of curiosity, concluded to remain on the landing and listen to the conversation, instead of entering the room.

CHAPTER IV.

THE VOICE OF THE TEMPTER.

THE speaker was a man about forty-five years of age, with regular though rather haggard features and a long moustache, made as black and lustrous by some cosmetic as his artistically curled locks, which evidently owed their raven hue to artificial means. The stranger's physiognomy impressed one as being a peculiar combination of deceitfulness, cunning, and impertinence. He had large feet and remarkably large hands; in short, despite his very evident pretensions, it was easy to see that he was one of those vulgar persons who cannot imitate, but only parody real elegance. Dressed in execrable taste, with a broad red ribbon in the buttonhole of his frock coat, he affected a military bearing. With his hat still on his head, he had seated himself a short distance from the bed, and as he talked with the invalid he gnawed the jewelled handle of a small cane that he carried.

Madame Lacombe was gazing at the stranger with mingled surprise and distrust. She was conscious, too, of a strong aversion, caused, doubtless, by his both insolent and patronising air.

"As your goddaughter is out, my good woman, I can state my business with you very plainly."

These were the words that Mariette overheard on reaching the landing. The conversation that ensued was, in substance, as follows:

"You asked, monsieur, if I were the Widow Lacombe,

Mariette Moreau's godmother," said the sick woman tartly. "I told you that I was. Now, what do you want with me? Explain, if you please."

"In the first place, my good woman —"

"My name is Lacombe, Madame Lacombe."

"Oh, very well, Madame Lacombe," said the stranger, with an air of mock deference, "I will tell you first who I am; afterwards I will tell you what I want. I am Commandant de la Miraudière." Then, touching his red ribbon, he added, "An old soldier as you see — ten campaigns — five wounds."

"That is nothing to me."

"I have many influential acquaintances in Paris, dukes, counts, and marquises."

"What do I care about that?"

"I keep a carriage, and spend at least twenty thousand francs a year."

"While my goddaughter and I starve on twenty sous a day, when she can earn them," said the sick woman, bitterly. "That is the way of the world, however."

"But it is not fair, my good Mother Lacombe," responded Commandant de la Miraudière, "it is not fair, and I have come here to put an end to such injustice."

"If you've come here to mock me, I wish you'd take yourself off," retorted the sick woman, sullenly.

"Mock you, Mother Lacombe, mock you! Just hear what I have come to offer you. A comfortable room in a nice apartment, a servant to wait on you, two good meals a day, coffee every morning, and fifty francs a month for your snuff, if you take it, or for anything else you choose to fancy, if you don't, — well, what do you say to all this, Mother Lacombe?"

"I say — I say you're only making sport of me, that is, unless there is something behind all this. When one offers such things to a poor old cripple like me, it is not for the love of God, that is certain."

"No, Mother Lacombe, but for the love of two beautiful eyes, perhaps."

"Whose beautiful eyes?"

"Your goddaughter's, Mother Lacombe," replied Commandant de la Miraudière, cynically. "There is no use beating about the bush."

The invalid made a movement indicative of surprise, then, casting a searching look at the stranger, inquired:

"You know Mariette, then?"

"I have been to Madame Jourdan's several times to order linen, for I am very particular about my linen," added the stranger, glancing down complacently at his embroidered shirt-front. "I have consequently often seen your goddaughter there; I think her charming, adorable, and —"

"And you have come to buy her of me?"

"Bravo, Mother Lacombe! You are a clever and sensible woman, I see. You understand things in the twinkling of an eye. This is the proposition I have come to make to you: A nice suite of rooms, newly furnished for Mariette, with whom you are to live, five hundred francs a month to run the establishment, a maid and a cook who will also wait on you, a suitable outfit for Mariette, and a purse of fifty louis to start with, to say nothing of the other presents she will get if she behaves properly. So much for the substantials. As for the agreeable part, there will be drives in the park, boxes at the theatre, — I know any number of actors, and I am also on the best of terms with some very high-toned ladies who give many balls and card-parties, — in short, your goddaughter will have a delightful, an enchanted life, Mother Lacombe, the life of a duchess. Well, how does all this strike you?"

"Very favourably, of course," responded the sick woman, with a sardonic smile. "Such cattle as we are, are only fit to be sold when we are young, or to sell others when we are old."

"Ah, well, Mother Lacombe, to quiet your scruples, if you have any, you shall have sixty francs a month for your snuff, and I shall also make you a present of a handsome shawl, so you can go around respectably with Mariette, whom you are never to leave for a moment, understand, for I am as jealous as a tiger, and have no intention of being made a fool of."

"All this tallies exactly with what I said to Mariette only this morning. 'You are an honest girl,' I said to her, 'and yet you can scarcely earn twenty sous a day making three hundred franc chemises for a kept woman.'"

"Three hundred franc chemises ordered from Madame Jourdan's? Oh, yes, Mother Lacombe, I know. They are for Amandine, who is kept by the Marquis de Saint-Herem, an intimate friend of mine. It was I who induced her to patronise Madame Jourdan, — a regular bonanza for her, though the marquis is very poor pay, but he makes all his furnishers as well as all his mistresses the fashion. This little Amandine was a clerk in a little perfumery shop on the Rue Colbert six months ago, and Saint-Herem has made her the rage. There is no woman in Paris half as much talked about as Amandine. The same thing may happen to Mariette some day, Mother Lacombe. She may be wearing three hundred franc chemises instead of making them. Don't it make you proud to think of it?"

"Unless Mariette has the same fate as another poor girl I knew."

"What happened to her, Mother Lacombe?"

"She was robbed."

"Robbed?"

"She, too, was promised mountains of gold. The man who promised it placed her in furnished apartments, and at the end of three months left her without a penny. Then she killed herself in despair."

"Really, Mother Lacombe, what kind of a man do

you take me for?" demanded the stranger, indignantly. "Do I look like a scoundrel, like a Robert Macaire?"

"I don't know, I am sure."

"I, an old soldier who have fought in twenty campaigns, and have ten wounds! I, who am hand and glove with all the lions of Paris! I, who keep my carriage and spend twenty thousand francs a year! Speak out, what security do you want? If you say so, the apartment shall be furnished within a week, the lease made out in your name, and the rent paid one year in advance; besides, you shall have the twenty-five or thirty louis I have about me to bind the bargain, if you like."

And as he spoke, he drew a handful of gold from his pocket and threw it on the little table by the sick woman's bed, adding: "You see I am not like you. I am not afraid of being robbed, Mother Lacombe."

On hearing the chink of coin, the invalid leaned forward, and cast a greedy, covetous look upon the glittering pile. Never in her life had she had a gold coin in her possession, and now she could not resist the temptation to touch the gleaming metal, and let it slip slowly through her fingers.

"I can at least say that I have handled gold once in my life," the sick woman murmured, hoarsely.

"It is nothing to handle it, Mother Lacombe. Think of the pleasure of spending it."

"There is enough here to keep one in comfort five or six months," said the old woman, carefully arranging the gold in little piles.

"And remember that you and Mariette can have as much every month if you like, Mother Lacombe, in good, shining gold, if you wish it."

After a long silence, the sick woman raised her hollow eyes to the stranger's face, and said:

"You think Mariette pretty, monsieur. You are right,

and there is not a better-hearted, more deserving girl in the world. Well, be generous to her. This money is a mere trifle to a man as rich as you are. Make us a present of it."

"Eh?" exclaimed the stranger, in profound astonishment.

"Monsieur," said the consumptive, clasping her hands imploringly, "be generous, be charitable. This sum of money is a mere trifle to you, as I said before, but it would support us for months. We should be able to pay all we owe. Mariette would not be obliged to work night and day. She would have time to look around a little, and find employment that paid her better. We should owe five or six months of peace and happiness to your bounty. It costs us so little to live! Do this, kind sir, and we will for ever bless you, and for once in my life I shall have known what happiness is."

The sick woman's tone was so sincere, her request so artless, that the stranger, who could not conceive of any human creature being stupid enough really to expect such a thing of a man of his stamp, felt even more hurt than surprised, and said to himself:

"Really, this is not very flattering to me. The old hag must take me for a country greenhorn to make such a proposition as that."

So bursting into a hearty laugh, he said, aloud:

"You must take me for a philanthropist, or the winner of the Montyon prize, Mother Lacombe. I am to make you a present of six hundred francs, and accept your benediction and eternal gratitude in return, eh?"

The sick woman had yielded to one of those wild and sudden hopes that sometimes seize the most despondent persons; but irritated by the contempt with which her proposal had been received, she now retorted, with a sneer:

"I hope you will forgive me for having so grossly insulted you, I am sure, monsieur."

"Oh, you needn't apologise, Mother Lacombe. I have taken no offence, as you see. But we may as well settle this little matter without any further delay. Am I to pocket those shining coins you seem to take so much pleasure in handling, yes or no?"

And he stretched out his hand as if to gather up the gold pieces.

With an almost unconscious movement, the sick woman pushed his hand away, exclaiming, sullenly:

"Wait a minute, can't you? You needn't be afraid that anybody is going to eat your gold."

"On the contrary, that is exactly what I would like you to do, on condition, of course —"

"But I know Mariette, and she would never consent," replied the sick woman, with her eyes still fixed longingly upon the shining coins.

"Nonsense!"

"But she is an honest girl, I tell you. She might listen to a man she loved, as so many girls do, but to you, never. She would absolutely refuse. She has her ideas — oh, you needn't laugh."

"Oh, I know Mariette is a virtuous girl. Madame Jourdan, for whom your goddaughter has worked for years, has assured me of that fact; but I know, too, that you have a great deal of influence over her. She is dreadfully afraid of you, Madame Jourdan says, so I am sure that you can, if you choose, persuade or, if need be, compel Mariette to accept — what? Simply an unlooked-for piece of good fortune, for you are housed like beggars and almost starving, that is evident. Suppose you refuse, what will be the result? The girl, with all her fine disinterestedness, will be fooled sooner or later by some scamp in her own station in life, and —"

"That is possible, but she will not have sold herself."

"That is all bosh, as you'll discover some day when her lover deserts her, and she has to do what so many other girls do to save herself from starving."

"'*Go away and let me alone.*'"
Original etching by Adrian Marcel.

"That is very possible," groaned the sick woman. "Hunger is an evil counsellor, I know, when one has one's child as well as one's self to think of. And with this gold, how many of these poor girls might be saved! Ah! if Mariette is to end her days like them, after all, what is the use of struggling?"

For a minute or two the poor woman's contracted features showed that a terrible conflict was raging in her breast. The gold seemed to exercise an almost irresistible fascination over her; she seemed unable to remove her eyes from it; but at last with a desperate effort she closed them, as if to shut out the sight of the money, and throwing herself back on her pillow, cried, angrily:

"Go away, go away, and let me alone."

"What! you refuse my offer, Mother Lacombe?"

"Yes."

"Positively?"

"Yes."

"Then I've got to pocket all this gold again, I suppose," said the stranger, gathering up the coins, and making them jingle loudly as he did so. "All these shining yellow boys must go back into my pocket."

"May the devil take you and your gold!" exclaimed the now thoroughly exasperated woman. "Keep your money, but clear out. I didn't take Mariette in to ruin her, or advise her to ruin herself. Rather than eat bread earned in such way, I would light a brazier of charcoal and end both the girl's life and my own."

Madame Lacombe had scarcely uttered these words before Mariette burst into the room, pale and indignant, and throwing herself upon the sick woman's neck, exclaimed:

"Ah, godmother. I knew very well that you loved me as if I were your own child!"

Then turning to Commandant de la Miraudière, whom she recognised as the man who had stared at her so persistently at Madame Jourdan's, she said contemptuously:

"I beg that you will leave at once."

"But, my dear little dove —"

"I was there at the door, monsieur, and I heard all."

"So much the better. You know what I am willing to do, and I assure you —"

"Once more, I must request you to leave at once."

"Very well, very well, my little Lucrece, I will go, but I shall allow you one week for reflection," said the stranger, preparing to leave the room.

But on the threshold he paused and added:

"You will not forget my name, Commandant de la Miraudière, my dear. Madame Jourdan knows my address."

After which he disappeared.

"Ah, godmother," exclaimed the girl, returning to the invalid, and embracing her effusively, "how nobly you defended me!"

"Yes," responded the sick woman, curtly, freeing herself almost roughly from her goddaughter's embrace, "and yet with all these virtues, one perishes of hunger."

"But, godmother —"

"Don't talk any more about it, for heaven's sake!" cried the invalid, angrily. "It is all settled. What is the use of discussing it any further? I have done my duty; you have done yours. I am an honest woman; you are an honest girl. Great good it will do you, and me, too; you may rest assured of that."

"But, godmother, listen to me —"

"We shall be found here some fine morning stiff and cold, you and I, with a pan of charcoal between us. Ah, ha, ha!"

And with a shrill, mirthless laugh, the poor creature, embittered by years of misfortune, and chafing against the scruples that had kept her honest in spite of herself, put an end to the conversation by abruptly turning her back upon her goddaughter.

It was nearly night now.

THE VOICE OF THE TEMPTER.

Mariette went out into the hall where she had left the basket containing the sick woman's supper. She placed the food on a small table near the bed, and then went and seated herself silently by the narrow window, where, drawing the fragments of her lover's letter from her pocket, she gazed at them with despair in her soul.

On leaving Mariette, the commandant said to himself:

"I'm pretty sure that last shot told in spite of what they said. The girl will change her mind and so will the old woman. The sight of my gold seemed to dazzle the eyes of that old hag as much as if she had been trying to gaze at the noonday sun. Their poverty will prove a much more eloquent advocate for me than any words of mine. I do not despair, by any means. Two months of good living will make Mariette one of the prettiest girls in Paris, and she will do me great credit at very little expense. But now I must turn my attention to business. A fine little discovery it is that I have just made, and I think I shall be able to turn it to very good account."

Stepping into his carriage, he was driven to the Rue Grenelle St. Honoré. Alighting in front of No. 17, a very unpretentious dwelling, he said to the porter:

"Does M. Richard live here?"

"A father and son of that name both live here, monsieur."

"I wish to see the son. Is M. Louis Richard in?"

"Yes, monsieur. He has only just returned from a journey. He is with his father now."

"Ah, he is with his father? Well, I would like to see him alone."

"As they both occupy the same room, there will be some difficulty about that."

The commandant reflected a moment, then, taking a visiting card bearing his address from his pocket, he added these words in pencil: "requests the honour of a

visit from M. Louis Richard to-morrow morning between nine and ten, as he has a very important communication which will brook no delay, to make to him."

"Here are forty sous for you, my friend," said M. de la Miraudière to the porter, "and I want you to give this card to M. Louis Richard."

"That is a very easy way to earn forty sous."

"But you are not to give the card to him until to-morrow morning as he goes out, and his father is not to know anything about it. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly, monsieur, and there will be no difficulty about it as M. Louis goes out every morning at seven o'clock, while his father never leaves before nine."

"I can rely upon you, then?"

"Oh, yes, monsieur, you can regard the errand as done."

Commandant de la Miraudière reëntered his carriage and drove away.

Soon after his departure a postman brought a letter for Louis Richard. It was the letter written that same morning in Mariette's presence by the scrivener, who had addressed it to No. 17 Rue de Grenelle, Paris, instead of to Dreux as the young girl had requested.

We will now usher the reader into the room occupied by the scrivener, Richard, and his son, who had just returned from Dreux.

CHAPTER V.

FATHER AND SON.

THE father and son occupied on the fifth floor of this old house a room that was almost identical in every respect with the abode of Mariette and her godmother. Both were characterised by the same bareness and lack of comfort. A small bed for the father, a mattress for the son, a rickety table, three or four chairs, a chest for their clothing — these were the only articles of furniture in the room.

Father Richard, on his way home, had purchased their evening repast, an appetising slice of ham and a loaf of fresh bread. These he had placed upon the table with a bottle of water, and a single candle, whose faint light barely served to render darkness visible.

Louis Richard, who was twenty-five years of age, had a frank, honest, kindly, intelligent face, while his shabby, threadbare clothing, worn white at the seams, only rendered his physical grace and vigour more noticeable.

The scrivener's features wore a joyful expression, slightly tempered, however, by the anxiety he now felt in relation to certain long cherished projects of his own.

The young man, after having deposited his shabby valise on the floor, tenderly embraced his father, to whom he was devoted; and the happiness of being with him again and the certainty of seeing Mariette on the morrow made his face radiant, and increased his accustomed good humour.

"So you had a pleasant journey, my son," remarked the old man, seating himself at the table.

"Very."

"Won't you have some supper? We can talk while we eat."

"Won't I have some supper, father? I should think I would. I did not dine at the inn like the other travellers, and for the best of reasons," added Louis, gaily, slapping his empty pocket.

"You have little cause to regret the fact, probably," replied the old man, dividing the slice of ham into two very unequal portions, and giving the larger to his son. "The dinners one gets at wayside inns are generally very expensive and very poor."

As he spoke, he handed Louis a thick slice of bread, and the father and son began to eat with great apparent zest, washing down their food with big draughts of cold water.

"Tell me about your journey, my son," remarked the old man.

"There is very little to tell, father. My employer gave me a number of documents to be submitted to M. Ramon. He read and studied them very carefully, I must say. At least he took plenty of time to do it, — five whole days, after which he returned the documents with numberless comments, annotations, and corrections."

"Then you did not enjoy yourself particularly at Dreux, I judge."

"I was bored to death, father."

"What kind of a man is this M. Ramon, that a stay at his house should be so wearisome?"

"The worst kind of a person conceivable, my dear father. In other words, an execrable old miser."

"Hum! hum!" coughed the old man, as if he had swallowed the wrong way. "So he is a miser, is he? He must be very rich, then."

"I don't know about that. One may be stingy with a

small fortune as well as with a big one, I suppose; but if this M. Ramon's wealth is to be measured by his parsimony, he must be a multi-millionaire. He is a regular old Harpagon."

"If you had been reared in luxury and abundance, I could understand the abuse you heap upon this old Harpagon, as you call him; but we have always lived in such poverty that, however parsimonious M. Ramon may be, you certainly cannot be able to see much difference between his life and ours."

"Ah, father, you don't know what you're talking about."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, M. Ramon keeps two servants; we have none. He occupies an entire house; we both eat and sleep in this garret room. He has three or four courses at dinner, we take a bite of anything that comes handy, but for all that we live a hundred times better than that skinflint does."

"But I don't understand, my son," said Father Richard, who for some reason or other seemed to be greatly annoyed at the derogatory opinion his son expressed. "There can be no comparison between that gentleman's circumstances and ours."

"My dear father, we make no attempt to conceal our poverty at all events. We endure our privations cheerfully, and if I sometimes, in my ambitious moments, dream of a rather more comfortable existence, you know it is not on my own account, for I am very well satisfied with my lot."

"My dear boy, I know what a kind heart you have, I know, too, how much you love me, and the only thing that consoles me for our poverty is the knowledge that you do not repine at your lot."

"Repine at my lot when you share it? Besides, what we lack is really only the superfluous. We do not eat capons stuffed with truffles, it is true, but we eat with a

good appetite, — witness the rapid disappearance of this big loaf of bread; our clothes are threadbare, but warm; we earn, both together, from seventeen to eighteen hundred francs a year. Not a colossal amount, by any means, but we owe no man a penny. Ah, my dear father, if Heaven never sends me any worse trouble than this, I shall never complain."

"You have no idea how much pleasure it gives me to see you accept your lot in life so cheerfully. But tell me, are you really happy?"

"Very happy."

"Really and truly?"

"Why should I wish to deceive you? Do I ever look glum and sour like a man who is discontented with his lot?"

"That is only because you have such an uncommonly good disposition, perhaps."

"That depends. If I were obliged to live with that abominable old skinflint Ramon, I should soon become intolerable."

"Why are you so hard upon that poor man?"

"The recollection of the torture I endured under his roof, I suppose."

"Torture?"

"What else do you call it, father, to live in a big, cold, dilapidated, cheerless house, — a house so dreary, in fact, that the grave seems a cheerful abode in comparison? And then to see those two thin, solemn-faced, famished-looking servants wandering about in that grim sepulchre! And the meals, — meals at which the master of the house seems to count each morsel that you eat! And his daughter, — for the man has a daughter who will perpetuate the breed, I suppose, — and his daughter, who doles out scanty portions for the domestics, and then carefully locks up the remains of the meagre meal!"

"Louis, Louis, how is it that you, who are usually so

charitably inclined, should be so strangely hostile to this poor man and his daughter?"

"His daughter! Can you call such a thing as that a daughter, a big, raw-boned creature, with feet and hands like a man's, a face like a nutcracker, and a nose, — great Heavens! what a nose, — a nose as long as that, and of a brick-red colour? But justice compels me to say that this incomparable creature has yellow hair and black teeth to make up for her red nose."

"The portrait is not flattered, evidently, but all women cannot be pretty, and a kind heart is much better than a pretty face."

"True, father, but how strange it is that there should be such remarkable contrasts in some families."

"What do you mean?"

"Judge of my surprise on seeing in one of the apartments of that gloomy house the portrait of a woman with such a charming, refined, distinguished face that it seemed as if the picture must have been placed there expressly to spite hateful Miss Red Nose. You shake your head, father, but I am sure you ought not to censure me very severely. At first I felt very sorry for the young lady when I saw her so excessively ugly, and, above all, condemned to live with such an old skinflint of a father; but afterwards, when I saw her nearly badger the life out of those two poor servants, scolding them continually for the merest trifle, and doling out the very smallest amount of food that would suffice to keep them alive, my compassion changed to aversion and positive loathing. But to return to the subject of the picture. The portrait bore such a striking resemblance to one of my old schoolmates that I asked old Harpagon who the lady was, and greatly to my surprise he told me that it was a portrait of his sister, the late Madame de Saint-Herem. 'Then this lady is, doubtless, the mother of the young Marquis de Saint-Herem?' I asked, and if you could only have seen old Ramon's face! One would

have supposed I had just evoked the very devil himself. Miss Red Nose, too, made a gesture of pious horror (I forgot to tell you, to complete the picture, that she is one of the worst of bigots), whereupon her worthy parent answered that he had the misfortune to be the uncle of an infernal scoundrel named Saint-Herem."

"This M. de Saint-Herem must bear a very bad reputation, I judge."

"What! Florestan? the bravest and most delightful fellow in the world."

"But his uncle —"

"Listen, father, and you shall judge for yourself. Saint-Herem and I were very intimate at college, but I had lost sight of him for a long time, when about six months ago, as I was walking along the boulevard, I saw everybody turning to look at a beautiful mail phaeton drawn by two magnificent horses, and with two tiny footmen perched up behind. And who do you suppose was driving this exquisite turnout? My old college friend, Saint-Herem, who looked handsomer than ever; in fact, it would be impossible to conceive of a more distinguished-looking young man."

"I should judge that he must be a terrible spendthrift, though."

"Wait until you hear the end of my story, my dear father. The vehicle stopped suddenly, the little grooms jumped down and ran to the horses' heads. Saint-Herem sprang out of the phaeton, rushed up to me, and positively embraced me in his delight at meeting me again after such a long separation. I was dressed like the poor devil of a notary's clerk that I am, and you must admit, my dear father, that most men of fashion would have shrunk from even recognising such a plebeian-looking creature, but Florestan did not even seem to notice my plain apparel. As for me, I was both pleased and embarrassed by this manifestation of friendly feeling on his part, for we seemed to attract a great deal

of attention. Saint-Herem, too, must have noticed the fact, for he exclaimed:

"'Did you ever see such a set of gaping idiots? Where are you going?'

"'To the office.'

"'Then get in with me. We can talk as we drive along.'

"'What! get into that stylish carriage with my clumsy shoes and big umbrella? What will people think?' I replied. But Florestan only shrugged his shoulders, and, seizing me by the arm, half led, half dragged me to the carriage. On our way to the office he made me promise that I would come and see him, and finally he set me down at the notary's door with the warmest protestations of friendship and good-will. Now what do you think of a man who would act like that, father?"

"Pooh!" responded the scrivener, with a by no means enthusiastic air, "he yielded to a kindly impulse, that is all. I always distrust people who are so inclined to make a display of their friendship; besides, you are in no position to keep up such an acquaintance."

"I know that; still, under the circumstances, I felt obliged to keep my promise to take breakfast with Florestan on the following Sunday. The kind-hearted fellow treated me as if I were a prince, and begged me to come again, but I left for Dreux soon afterward, so I have not seen him since."

"It is very strange that you never said anything to me about your visit to him."

"Shall I tell you why I did not? I said to myself: 'My poor father loves me so much he may fear that the sight of Florestan's splendour will excite my envy, and make me dissatisfied with my own humble condition in life, so I will conceal the fact that I once breakfasted with a Sardanapalus or a Lucullus.'"

"My dear, brave boy!" exclaimed the old man, with deep emotion, "I understand; and the delicacy of your

conduct touches me deeply. It is only one more proof of your kindness and generosity of heart, but I beg that you will now listen to me attentively for a moment, for it is to this very generosity of feeling, as well as to your affection for me, that I am about to appeal. There is an extremely grave and important matter about which I must speak to you."

The scrivener's expression had become so serious and even solemn that the young man gazed at him with surprise; but just then the porter knocked at the door and said:

"Here is a letter for you, M. Louis."

"Very well," replied the young man, abstractedly, too much engaged in wondering what the important matter to which his father had alluded could be to pay much attention to the letter, which Father Richard instantly recognised as the one which he had written to his son that morning, and which he had addressed to the Rue de Grenelle instead of to Dreux, as poor Mariette had requested.

Knowing the contents of the missive, the old scrivener was on the point of advising his son to read the letter immediately, but, after a moment's reflection, he adopted the opposite course, and said:

"My dear boy, you will have plenty of time to read your letter by and by. Listen to me now, for I repeat there is a matter of great importance both to you and to me, that I must consult you about."

"I am at your service, my dear father," replied Louis, laying the letter which he had been about to open on the table.

CHAPTER VI.

A FATHER'S AMBITION.

FATHER RICHARD remained silent for a moment, then, turning to his son, said:

"I have warned you that I am about to appeal to your generosity as well as to your affection for me."

"Then you have only to speak, father."

"You told me just now that, if you sometimes dreamed of a less humble existence than ours, it was not on your own account, but mine."

"And that is perfectly true."

"Ah, well, my son, it only depends upon yourself to see this desire realised."

"What do you mean?"

"Listen to me. Reverses of fortune which closely followed your mother's death, while you were but an infant, left me barely property enough to defray the expenses of your education."

"Yes, my dear father, and the courage and resignation with which you have endured this misfortune have only increased my love and respect for you."

"Our pecuniary condition seems likely to speedily become worse instead of better, I regret to say. With old age fast coming on, and my failing vision, I realise that the day is near at hand when it will be impossible for me to earn even the pittance needed for my support."

"But, father, you may be sure —"

"Of your willing aid, I know that; but your own future is precarious in the extreme. The most you can

hope for is to become chief clerk in a notary's office, for it takes money to study a profession, and I am poor."

"Do not worry, father. I shall always be able to earn money enough for us two."

"But what if sickness should come, or some accident should befall either of us, or you should be thrown out of employment for several months, what would become of us then?"

"My dear father, if we poor people stopped to think of the misfortunes that might befall us, we should lose courage. Let us close our eyes to the future, and think only of the present. That, thank Heaven! is not alarming."

"Yes, I admit that it is better not to think of the future when it is alarming, but when it may be happy and prosperous, if we choose to make it so, is it not well to open our eyes instead of closing them?"

"Certainly."

"So I repeat, that it depends entirely upon yourself to make our future both happy and prosperous."

"You may consider it done, then. Only tell me how I am to do it."

"I shall surprise you very much, I am sure, when I tell you that this M. Ramon with whom you have just spent several days, and whom you so cruelly misjudge, is an old friend of mine, and that the visit you just paid him was planned by him and me."

"But the papers my employer — "

"Your employer kindly consented to assist us by charging you with a pretended mission to Ramon."

"But why was it considered necessary to resort to this trick?"

"Ramon wished to see you and study you; in other words, to become thoroughly acquainted with you without your suspecting it, and I feel it my duty to tell you that he is delighted with you. I received a long letter

from him this very morning, in which he speaks of you in the highest terms."

"I regret that I am unable to return the compliment; but how can M. Ramon's good or bad opinion affect me?"

"It does affect you very seriously, though, my dear boy, for the prosperous future of which I spoke is entirely dependent upon the opinion Ramon has of you."

"You speak in enigmas, father."

"Ramon, without being what is called rich, possesses a comfortable fortune, which, by reason of his wise economy, is increasing every day."

"I can readily believe that, only what you call economy is contemptible stinginess, father."

"Don't let us haggle about terms, my son. Call it parsimony or economy, or what you will, in consequence of it Ramon is sure to leave his daughter a handsome fortune, though he will give her nothing during his lifetime."

"That does not surprise me in the least; but I really cannot imagine what you are driving at, father?"

"I rather hesitate to tell you, because, however erroneous first impressions may be, they are very tenacious, and you have expressed yourself so harshly in relation to Mlle. Ramon —"

"Miss Red Nose? On the contrary, I assure you that I have been extremely lenient."

"Oh, you will get over your prejudice, I am sure. Believe me, Mlle. Ramon is one of those persons who have to be known to be appreciated. She is a young woman of remarkable strength of character as well as of the most exemplary piety. What more can one ask in the mother of a family?"

"The mother of a family?" repeated Louis, who, though he was far from suspecting the danger that menaced him, began to be conscious of a vague uneasiness. "And what difference does it make to me whether

Mlle. Ramon proves an admirable mother of a family or not?"

"It is a matter of vital importance to you."

"To me?"

"Yes."

"And why?" demanded Louis, anxiously.

"Because it is the one desire of my life to see you Mlle. Ramon's husband," answered the old man, firmly.

"Mlle. Ramon's husband!" cried Louis, springing up with a movement of positive horror; "I marry that woman?"

"Yes, my son. Marry Mlle. Ramon, and our future is assured. We will go to Dreux to live. The house is large enough for us all. Ramon will give his daughter no dowry, but we are to live with him, that is decided, and he will procure you a lucrative situation. When your father-in-law dies, you will come into a handsome fortune. Louis, my son, my beloved son," added the old man, imploringly, seizing his son's hands, "consent to this marriage, I beg of you. Consent to it, and you will make me the happiest of men."

"Ah, father, you do not know what you are asking," replied Louis.

"You are going to say that you do not love Mlle. Ramon, perhaps; but mutual respect and esteem are sufficient, and you can give both to Mlle. Ramon, for she deserves them. As for her father, the parsimony that shocked you so much at first, will seem less objectionable when you recollect that, after all, you are the person who will profit by it, eventually. Ramon is really a most estimable man. The one ambition of his life is to leave his daughter and the husband of her choice a handsome fortune; to attain this end, he keeps his expenses down as much as possible. Is this any crime, I should like to know? Come, Louis, my dear boy, answer me, give me a word of hope."

"Father, much as it costs me to thwart your plans,

what you ask is impossible," replied the young man, sadly.

"Louis, can it be you that answers me in this way when I appeal to your love for me?"

"In the first place, you would derive no personal advantage from this marriage. You are thinking only of my interest when you urge it upon me."

"What! is it nothing to be able to live with Ramon without being obliged to spend a sou? For it is understood that we are to live there for nothing, I tell you, as he gives his daughter no dowry."

"So long as I have a drop of blood in my veins, I will accept charity from no man, father. More than once already I have begged you to abandon your profession of scrivener, and let me supply our modest wants without any assistance from you. I can easily do it by working a little harder."

"But if your health should fail, and old age should prevent me from earning a livelihood, there would be nothing left for me but to go to the almshouse."

"I have faith in my courage. I shall not lose my health, and you will want for nothing; but, if I had to marry Mlle. Ramon, I should certainly die of grief and despair."

"You are not in earnest, Louis?"

"I certainly am, father. I feel, and I always shall feel, an unconquerable aversion to Mlle. Ramon; besides, I love a young girl, and she, and she alone, shall be my wife."

"I fancied I had your confidence, and yet you have come to such an important decision as this without my even suspecting it."

"I have been silent on the subject, because I wished to give convincing proofs of the permanent nature of this attachment before I confided my intentions to you. I, and the young girl I love, accordingly agreed to wait one year in order to see if our natures were really con-

genial, and if what we considered real love were only an ephemeral fancy. Our love has withstood every test, thank God! The year expires to-day, and I shall see the girl I love to-morrow, in order to decide upon the day that she will broach the subject to her godmother who reared her. Forgive me, father," added Louis, interrupting the old man as he was about to speak; "I wish to say one word more. The girl I love is poor, and works for her daily bread as I do, but she is the best and noblest creature I know. Never will you find a more devoted daughter. Her earnings and mine will suffice for our needs; she is accustomed to even greater privations than we are. I will toil with redoubled ardour and diligence, and, believe me, you shall have the rest you so much need. Any disagreement between you and me is intensely painful to me. This is the first time, I believe, that we have ever differed in opinion, so spare me the sorrow of again refusing to comply with your request, I beseech you. Do not insist further upon the subject of this marriage. I can never resign myself to it, never! Nor will I ever have any other woman for my wife than Mariette Moreau!"

Louis uttered these last words in such a firm, though respectful tone that the old man, not considering it advisable to insist further, replied, with a disappointed air:

"I cannot believe, Louis, that all the reasons I have urged in favour of this marriage will remain valueless in your eyes. I have more faith in your heart than you have in mine, and I feel sure that a little reflection on your part will lead you to reconsider your decision."

"You must not hope that, father."

"I will so far comply with your wishes as to insist no further at this time; I trust to reflection to bring you to a different frame of mind. I give you twenty-four hours to come to a final decision. I will promise not to say another word to you on the subject until that time

expires; and I must request you, in turn, to make no further allusion to your wishes. Day after to-morrow we will talk the matter over again."

"So be it, father, but I assure you that at the expiration of —"

"We have agreed not to discuss the matter further at this time," interrupted the old man, beginning to walk the room in silence, with an occasional furtive glance at Louis, who, with his head supported on his hands, still remained seated at the table on which he had placed the letter a short time before.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FORGED LETTER.

His eyes having at last chanced to fall upon this letter addressed to him in a handwriting he did not recognise, Louis broke the seal mechanically.

A moment afterward, the old man, who was still silently pacing the floor, saw his son suddenly turn pale and pass his hand across his forehead as if to satisfy himself that he was not the victim of an optical delusion, then re-read with increasing agitation a missive which he seemed unable to credit.

This letter, which Father Richard had written in a disguised hand that morning, ostensibly from Mariette's dictation, far from expressing that young girl's real sentiments, read as follows:

"M. Louis: — I take advantage of your absence to write you what I should not dare to tell you, — what, in fact, I have put off confessing for more than two months for fear of causing you pain. All idea of a marriage between us must be abandoned, M. Louis, as well as all idea of ever seeing each other again.

"It is impossible for me to tell you the cause of this change in my feelings, but I assure you that my mind is fully made up. The reason I did not inform you yesterday, the sixth of May, M. Louis, the sixth of May, is that I wished to think the matter over once more, and in your absence, before telling you my decision.

"Farewell, M. Louis. Do not try to see me again. It

would be useless and would only cause me great pain. If, on the contrary, you make no attempt to see me, or to induce me to reconsider my determination, my happiness as well as that of my poor godmother is assured.

"It is consequently for the sake of the happiness and peace of mind of both of us, M. Louis, that I implore you not to insist upon another meeting.

"You are so kind-hearted that I am sure you would not like to cause me unnecessary pain, for I solemnly swear that all is over between us. You will not insist further, I hope, when I tell you that I no longer love you except as a friend. MARIETTE MOREAU.

"P. S. Instead of addressing this letter to Dreux, as you requested, I send it to your Paris address, in order that you may find it there on your return. Augustine, who has written for me heretofore, having gone home on a visit, I have had recourse to another person.

"I forgot to say that my godmother's health remains about the same."

The perusal of this letter plunged Louis into a profound stupor. The ingenuous style of composition, the numerous petty details, the allusion, twice repeated, to the sixth of May, all proved that the missive must have been dictated by Mariette, so, after vainly asking himself what could be the cause of this sudden rupture, anger, grief, and wounded pride, all struggled for the mastery in the young man's heart, and he murmured:

"She need not insist so strongly upon my making no attempt to see her again! Why should I desire to do so?"

But grief soon overcame anger in the young man's heart. He endeavoured to recall all the particulars of his last interview with Mariette, but no indication of the slightest alienation of affection presented itself to his mind. On the contrary, never had she seemed more

loving and devoted, — never had she seemed so eager to unite her lot with his. And yet, unless appearances were deceiving him, Mariette, whom he had always believed so pure and honest, was a monster of dissimulation.

Louis could not believe that; so, impatient to solve the mystery, and unable to endure this suspense any longer, he resolved to go to Mariette's home at once, even at the risk of offending her godmother, who, like Father Richard, had had no suspicion of the young people's mutual love up to the present time.

Not one of the different emotions which had in turn agitated the young man had escaped the scrivener's watchful eye, as, thinking it quite time to interfere, he said:

"Louis, we must leave for Dreux early to-morrow morning, for, if we do not, Ramon is sure to be here day after to-morrow, as has been agreed upon."

"Father!"

"Such a proceeding on our part does not compromise us in the least, and if you are determined to oppose the dearest wish of my heart, I only ask that you will spend a few more days with Ramon and his daughter, as a favour to me. After that, you will be perfectly free to act as you see fit."

Then seeing Louis pick up his hat, as if he intended to go out, Father Richard exclaimed:

"What are you doing? Where are you going?"

"I have a slight headache, father, and I am going out for awhile."

"Don't, I beg of you," exclaimed the old man, with growing alarm. "You have looked and acted very strangely ever since you read that letter. You frighten me."

"You are mistaken, father. There is nothing the matter with me. I have a slight headache, that is all. I shall be back soon."

And Louis left the room abruptly.

As he passed the porter's lodge, that functionary stopped him, and said, with a mysterious air:

"M. Louis, I want to see you alone for a moment. Step inside, if you please."

"What is it?" asked Louis, as he complied with the request.

"Here is a card that a gentleman left for you. He came in a magnificent carriage, and said that his business was very important."

Louis took the card, and, approaching the lamp, read:

"*Commandant de la Miraudiere,*
17 *Rue du Mont-Blanc.*

"Requests the honour of a visit from M. Louis Richard to-morrow morning between nine and ten, as he has a very important communication, which will brook no delay, to make to him."

"Commandant de la Miraudière? I never heard the name before," Louis said to himself, as he examined the card, then, turning it over mechanically, he saw, written in pencil on the other side:

"Mariette Moreau, with Madame Lacombe, Rue des Prêtres St. Germain l'Auxerrois."

For M. de la Miraudière, having jotted down Mariette's address on one of his visiting cards, had, without thinking, written upon the same card the request for an interview which he had left for Louis.

That young man, more and more perplexed, endeavoured in vain to discover what possible connection there could be between Mariette and the stranger who had left the card. After a moment's silence, he said to the porter:

"Did the gentleman leave any other message?"

"He told me to give you the card when your father was not present."

"That is strange," thought the young man.

"What kind of a looking man was he — young or old?" he asked, aloud.

"A very handsome man, M. Louis, a decorated gentleman, with a moustache as black as ink, and very elegantly dressed."

Louis went out with his brain in a whirl. This new revelation increased his anxiety. The most absurd suspicions and fears immediately assailed him, and he forthwith began to ask himself if this stranger were not a rival.

In her letter Mariette had implored Louis to make no attempt to see her again. Such a step on his part, would, she said, endanger not only her own happiness, but that of her godmother as well. Louis knew the trying position in which the two women were placed, and a terrible suspicion occurred to him. Perhaps Mariette, impelled as much by poverty as by her godmother's persistent entreaties, had listened to the proposals of the man whose card he, Louis, had just received. In that case, what could be the man's object in requesting an interview? Louis racked his brain in the hope of solving this mystery, but in vain.

These suspicions once aroused, the supposition that he had been betrayed for the sake of a rich rival seemed the only possible explanation of Mariette's strange conduct. Under these circumstances he abandoned his intention of going to Mariette's house for the present, or at least until after his interview with the commandant, from whom he was resolved to extort an explanation.

He returned home about midnight, and his father, convinced by the gloomy expression of his son's countenance that he could not have seen the girl and discovered the deception that had been practised upon both of them, again proposed that they should leave for Dreux the next morning, but Louis replied that he desired more time for reflection before taking this

important step, and threw himself despairingly on his pallet.

Sleep was an impossibility, and at daybreak he stole out of the room to escape his father's questions, and after having waited in mortal anxiety on the boulevard for the hour appointed for his interview with Commandant de la Miraudière, he hastened to that gentleman's house.

CHAPTER VIII.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

WHEN Louis presented himself at the house of Commandant de la Miraudière, that gentleman was sitting at his desk, enveloped in a superb dressing-gown, smoking his cigar, and examining a big pile of notes and bills.

While he was thus engaged, his servant entered, and announced:

"M. Richard."

"Ask M. Richard to wait in the drawing-room a moment. When I ring, show him in."

As soon as the servant left the room, M. de la Miraudière opened a secret drawer in his desk, and took out twenty-five one thousand franc notes, and placed them beside a sheet of the stamped paper used for legal documents of divers kinds, then rang the bell.

Louis entered, with a gloomy and perturbed air. His heart throbbed violently at the thought that he was, perhaps, in the presence of a favoured rival, for this poor fellow, like sincere lovers in general, greatly exaggerated the advantages which his competitor possessed, so M. de la Miraudière, wrapped in a handsome dressing-gown, and occupying an elegant suite of apartments, seemed a very formidable rival indeed.

"Is it to M. Louis Richard that I have the honour of speaking?" inquired M. de la Miraudière, with his most ingratiating smile.

"Yes, monsieur."

"The only son of M. Richard, the scrivener?"

These last words were uttered with a rather sarcastic air. Louis noted the fact, and responded, dryly:

"Yes, monsieur, my father is a scrivener."

"Excuse me, my dear sir, for having given you so much trouble, but it was absolutely necessary that I should talk with you alone, and as that seemed well-nigh impossible at your own home, I was obliged to ask you to take the trouble to call here."

"May I ask why you wished to see me, monsieur?"

"Merely to offer you my services, my dear M. Richard," replied M. de la Miraudière in an insinuating tone. "For it would give me great pleasure to be able to call you my client."

"Your client? Why, who are you, monsieur?"

"An old soldier, now on the retired list, — twenty campaigns, ten wounds, — now a man of affairs, merely to pass away the time. I have a number of large capitalists as backers, and I often act as an intermediary between them and young men of prospective wealth."

"Then I do not know of any service you can render me."

"You say that, when you are leading a life of drudgery as a notary's clerk, when you are vegetating — positively vegetating — living in a miserable attic with your father, and dressed, Heaven knows how!"

"Monsieur!" exclaimed Louis, fairly purple with indignation.

"Excuse me, my young friend, but these are, I regret to say, the real facts of the case, shameful as they appear. Why, a young man like you ought to be spending twenty-five or thirty thousand francs a year, ought to have his horses and mistresses and enjoy life generally."

"Monsieur, if this is intended as a joke, I warn you that I am in no mood for it," said Louis, angrily.

"As I have already told you, I am an old soldier who has proved his valour on many a well-fought field, my young friend, so I can afford not to take offence at your

manner, for which there is plenty of excuse, I must admit, as what I am saying must seem rather extraordinary to you."

"Very extraordinary, monsieur."

"Here is something that may serve to convince you that I am speaking seriously," added the man of affairs, spreading out the thousand franc notes on his desk. "Here are twenty-five thousand francs that I should be delighted to place at your disposal, together with twenty-five hundred francs a month for the next five years."

Louis, unable to believe his own ears, gazed at M. de la Miraudière in speechless astonishment, but at last, partially recovering from his stupor, he said:

"You make this offer to me, monsieur?"

"Yes, and with very great pleasure."

"To me, Louis Richard?"

"To you, Louis Richard."

"Richard is a very common name, monsieur. You probably mistake me for some other person."

"No, no, my young friend, I know what I am talking about, and I also know who I am talking to. It is to Louis Désiré Richard, only son of M. Alexandre Timoléon Bénédict Pamphile Richard, aged sixty-seven, born in Brie Comte Robert, but now residing at No. 17, Rue de Grenelle St. Honoré, a scrivener by profession. There is no mistake, you see, my young friend."

"Then as you know my family so well, you must also know that my poverty prevents me from contracting any such a loan."

"Your poverty!"

"Yes, monsieur."

"It is shameful, it is outrageous, to rear a young man under such a misapprehension of the real state of affairs," exclaimed the commandant, indignantly, "to compel him to spend the best years of his life in the stock, as it were, and to compel him to wear shabby clothes and woollen stockings and brogans. Fortunately, there is such

a thing as Providence, and you now behold a humble instrument of Providence in the shape of Commandant de la Miraudière."

"I assure you that all this is extremely tiresome, monsieur. If you cannot explain more clearly, we had better bring this interview to an immediate conclusion."

"Very well, then. You believe your father to be a very poor man, do you not?"

"I am not ashamed of the fact."

"Oh, credulous youth that you are! Listen and bless me ever afterward."

As he spoke, M. de la Miraudière drew a large leather-bound book resembling a ledger toward him, and, after a moment's search, read aloud as follows:

"'Inventory of Personal Property of M. Alexandre Timoléon Bénédict Pamphile Richard, from information secured by the Committee on Loans of the Bank of France, May 1, 18—.

"'1st.	Three thousand nine hundred and twenty shares of the Bank of France, market value,	924,300 fr.
"'2d.	Notes of the Mont de Piété,	875,250
"'3d.	On Deposit in the Bank of France,	259,130
	"'Total,	2,058,680 fr.'

"You see from these figures, my ingenuous young friend, that the known personal property of your honoured parent amounted, on the first of this month, to considerably over two million francs; but it is more than likely that, after the fashion of most misers who take a vast amount of pleasure in seeing and handling a part of their wealth, he has a large amount of money hoarded away in some convenient hiding-place. Even if this should not be the case, you see that the author of your being possesses more than two million francs, and as he spends barely twelve hundred francs out of an income of nearly one hundred thousand, you can form some idea of the

amount of wealth you will enjoy some day, and you can no longer wonder at the offer I have just made you."

Louis was petrified with astonishment by this revelation. He could not utter a word, but merely gazed at the speaker with inexpressible amazement.

"You seem to be knocked all in a heap, my young friend. You act as if you were dazed."

"I really do not know what to think of all this," stammered Louis.

"Do as St. Thomas did, then. Touch these bank-notes and perhaps that will convince you. The capitalists who are backing me are not inclined to run any risk with their lucre, and they are willing to advance you this money at seven per cent., with a like commission for my services in addition. Interest and loan together will scarcely amount to one-half of your father's yearly income, so you will still be piling up money, even if you should live as a gentleman ought to live, and spend fifty thousand francs a year. It will be impossible for you to get along on less than that, but you can at least wait with patience for the hour of your honoured parent's demise, you understand. And, by the way, I have provided for every contingency, as you will see when I tell you about the little scheme I have invented, for of course your good father will be astonished at the change in your mode of living, so you are to invest in a lottery ticket — the prize, a magnificent five hundred louis diamond; price of tickets, ten francs each. The drawing takes place day after to-morrow; you will win the prize and sell it again for eight or nine thousand francs. This money you must allow a friend to invest for you in a wonderfully successful enterprise, which will yield three hundred per cent. a year. Thanks to this stratagem, you can spend twenty-five or thirty thousand francs a year under your father's very nose. Tell me, now, young man, haven't you good cause to regard me in the light of a guardian angel, or a beneficent Providence? But

what on earth is the matter with you? What is the meaning of this clouded brow, this solemn air, this gloomy silence, when I expected to see you half-delirious with joy, and fairly turning somersaults in your delight at being transformed from a clerk into a millionaire, in less than a quarter of an hour. Speak, young man, speak! Can it be that joy and astonishment have bereft him of reason?"

It is a fact that a revelation which would undoubtedly have filled any one else with the wildest joy had only aroused a feeling of painful resentment in Louis Richard's breast. The deception his father had practised upon him wounded him deeply, but bitterer still was the thought that, but for Mariette's cruel desertion, he might have shared this wealth with her some day, and changed the laborious, squalid life the young girl had always led into one of ease and luxury.

This reflection, reviving as it did such poignant regrets, dominated him so completely that, forgetting everything else, he drew out the visiting card the commandant had left for him, and demanded, abruptly:

"Will you tell me how it happens that Mlle. Moreau's name and address are written in pencil on the back of this card?"

"What!" exclaimed the commandant, amazed at the question, especially at such a moment. "You wish to know —"

"How it happens that Mlle. Moreau's address is on this card. When I ask a question, I expect to have it answered."

"The devil! My young friend, you are trying to carry things with a high hand, it strikes me."

"You are at perfect liberty to take offence at my manner, if you choose."

"Really, monsieur!" exclaimed the usurer, straightening himself up and twirling his black moustache quite ferociously. Then, with a sudden change of manner, he

added: "Oh, nonsense! I have proved my valour beyond all question. An old soldier, with any number of wounds, I can afford to let many things pass; so I will merely say, my dear client, that that young girl's name and address happen to be on the card because I wrote them there so I would not forget them."

"You know Mlle. Mariette, then?"

"I do."

"You are paying court to her, perhaps?"

"Rather."

"With hopes of success?"

"Decidedly."

"Very well, I forbid you ever to set foot in her house again."

"Ah, ha! so I have a rival," the usurer said to himself. "How funny! I understand the girl's refusal now. I must get ahead of my client, though. He is young and unsophisticated, — that means he is jealous. He will be sure to fall into the trap, then I can oust him, for I've set my heart on the girl, and if I can't get her this young fellow sha'n't. I'm resolved upon that!"

After which, he added aloud:

"My dear friend, when I am forbidden to do anything, I consider it my bounden duty to do precisely what I am forbidden to do."

"We will see about that, monsieur."

"Listen, young man. I have fought fifty-seven duels, so I can easily dispense with fighting the fifty-eighth with you. I prefer, consequently, to try to induce you to listen to the voice of reason, if possible. Permit me, therefore, to ask you one question: You have just returned from a journey, I believe?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"You were absent several days, I think. May I ask if you have seen Mariette since your return?"

"No, monsieur, but —"

"Ah, well, my young friend, the same thing has hap-

pened to you that has happened to many other lovers. Mariette was not aware that you were the son of a millionaire; I presented myself in your absence, and offered her what has never yet failed to turn the head of a half-starved grisette. Her godmother, who was also dying of hunger, craved the fleshpots of Egypt, natually, — and, well, '*les absents ont toujours tort*,' you know. Ha, ha, you understand!"

"My God!" groaned Louis, his anger giving place to profound despair. "My God! it is true, then."

"If I had known that I was interfering with a prospective client, I would have abstained, I assure you. Now it is too late. Besides, there are as good fish in the sea — You know the proverb. Come, my young friend, don't take it so much to heart. The girl was entirely too young for you. She needs training. You will find plenty of charming women already trained and thoroughly trained. I can particularly recommend a certain Madame — "

"Wretch!" exclaimed Louis, seizing the man of affairs by the collar, "wretch! — "

"Monsieur, you shall answer for this!" exclaimed the commandant, trying to wrench himself from his rival's iron grasp.

Just then the door opened suddenly, and, at the sound of a loud laugh, both men turned simultaneously.

"Saint-Herem!" exclaimed Louis, recognising his old schoolmate.

"You here!" exclaimed Florestan de Saint-Herem, while the usurer, adjusting the collar of his dressing-gown, muttered savagely under his breath:

"What the devil brought Saint-Herem here just at this most inopportune moment, I should like to know!"

CHAPTER IX.

COMMANDANT DE LA MIRAUDIÈRE'S ANTECEDENTS.

M. DE SAINT-HEREM was a handsome man, not over thirty years of age, with a remarkably distinguished manner and bearing. His refined and rather spirituelle face sometimes wore an expression of extreme superciliousness, as when he addressed any remark to Commandant de la Miraudière, for instance; but at the sight of his old schoolmate he seemed to experience the liveliest joy. He even embraced him affectionately, and Louis returned the embrace heartily, spite of the conflicting emotions that agitated him.

But this manifestation of surprise and pleasure over, the chief actors in the scene relapsed into the same mood they had been in when Saint-Herem so unexpectedly burst in upon them, and Louis, pale with anger, continued to cast such wrathful glances at the usurer that M. de Saint-Herem said to that gentleman, with a mocking air:

"You must admit that I arrived very opportunely. But for my timely appearance upon the scene of action, it seems to me my friend Louis would soon have taken all the starch out of you."

"To dare to lay his hand on me, an old soldier!" exclaimed the commandant, advancing a step toward Louis. "This matter shall not be allowed to end here, M. Richard."

"That is for you to say, M. de la Miraudière."

"M. de la Miraudière? Ha, ha, ha!" roared Flores-

tan. "What! my dear Louis, you really take that fellow seriously? You believe in his title, in his cross, in his campaigns, his wounds, his duels, and his high-sounding name?"

"Enough of this jesting," said the pretended commandant, colouring with vexation. "Even friendly raillery has its limits, my dear fellow."

"M. Jerome Porquin," began Florestan, then, turning to Louis, he added, pointing to the usurer, "his real name is Porquin, and a very appropriate name it is, it seems to me."

Then once more addressing the pretended commandant, Florestan added, in a tone that admitted of no reply:

"This is the second time I have been obliged to forbid your calling me your dear friend, M. Porquin. It is different with me, I have bought and paid for the right to call you my dear, my enormously, entirely too dear M. Porquin, for you have swindled me most outrageously —"

"Really, monsieur, I will not allow —"

"What is that? Since when has M. Porquin become so terribly sensitive?" cried Saint-Herem, with an affectation of intense astonishment. "What has happened? Oh, yes, I understand. It is your presence, my friend Louis, that makes this much too dear M. Porquin squirm so when I expose his falsehoods and his absurd pretensions. To settle this vexed question once for all, I must tell you — and let us see if he will have the effrontery to contradict me — who M. le Commandant de la Miraudière really is. He has never served his country except in the sutler's department. He went to Madrid in that capacity during the late war, and as he proved to be too great an expense to the government, he was asked to take himself off. He did so, and transformed himself into what he calls a man of affairs, or, in other words, into a usurer, and an intermediary in all

sorts of shady transactions. The decoration he wears is that of the Golden Spur, a papal order, which one holy man procured from another holy man as a reward for his assistance in a most atrocious swindle. He has never fought a duel in his life, in the first place because he is one of the biggest cowards that ever lived, and in the second place because he bears such a bad reputation that he knows perfectly well that no respectable man would condescend to fight with him, and that if he becomes insolent the only thing to do is to give him a sound thrashing."

"When you want to make use of me you do not treat me in this fashion, monsieur," said the usurer, sullenly.

"When I need you, I pay you, M. Porquin, and as I know all your tricks, my too dear M. Porquin, I feel it my duty to warn my friend, M. Richard, against you. You are doubtless eager to devour him; in fact, it is more than likely that you have already begun to weave your toils around him, but — "

"That is the way some persons reward faithful service!" exclaimed M. Porquin, bitterly. "I reveal a secret of the highest importance to him, and — "

"I understand your motive now," responded Louis Richard, dryly, "so I owe you no gratitude for the service you have rendered me, — that is, if it be a service," he added, sadly.

The usurer had no intention of losing his prey, however, and, deeming it advisable to ignore the insults M. de Saint-Herem had heaped upon him, he said to Saint-Herem, with as much assurance as if that gentleman had not so roughly unmasked him:

"Your friend, M. Richard is at perfect liberty to tell you the conditions of the bargain I just proposed to him, and you can then judge whether my demands are exorbitant or not. As my presence might be a constraint, gentlemen, will you kindly step into the adjoining room? I will await M. Richard's decision here; that

is, of course, if he desires to ask your advice on the subject."

"An admirable suggestion, truly, my too dear M. Porquin," responded Florestan, promptly. And, taking Louis by the arm, he led him toward the door, remarking to the usurer, as he did so:

"On my return, I will tell you the object of my visit, or rather, I will tell you now. I must have two hundred louis this evening. Here, examine these securities."

And M. de Saint-Herem, drawing some papers from his pocket, threw them to the usurer, then entered the adjoining room, accompanied by his friend.

The revelation of M. Porquin's real character was another terrible blow to Louis Richard. The knowledge that it was for the sake of such a wretch as this that Mariette had been false to him caused him bitter sorrow, and, unable to restrain his feelings, as soon as he found himself alone with his friend, he seized both Saint-Herem's hands, and, in a voice trembling with emotion, exclaimed:

"Oh, Florestan, how miserable I am!"

"I suspected as much, my dear Louis, for it must be worse than death for a sensible, industrious fellow like you to find yourself in the clutches of a scoundrel like Porquin. What is the trouble? Your habits have always been so frugal, how did you manage to get into debt? Tell me about it. What seems an enormous sum to you may be but a trifle to me. I just told that rascal in there that he was to let me have two hundred louis this evening, and I am sure he will. You shall share them with me, or you can have the whole amount if you want it. Two hundred louis will certainly pay all the debts any notary's clerk can have contracted. I do not say this to humiliate you, far from it. If you need more, we will try to get it elsewhere, but for God's sake don't apply to Porquin. If you do you are lost. I know the scoundrel so well."

Saint-Herem's generous offer gave Louis such heart-felt pleasure that he almost forgot his sorrows for the moment.

"My dear, kind friend, if you knew how much this proof of your friendship consoles me," he exclaimed.

"So much the better. You accept my offer, then."

"No."

"What?"

"I do not need your kind services. This usurer, whom I had never heard of before, sent for me yesterday to offer to loan me, each year, more money than I have spent in my whole life."

"What! He makes you such an offer as that, this usurer who never loans so much as a sou without the very best security. Men of his stamp set a very small valuation on honesty, industry, and integrity, and I know that these are your sole patrimony, my dear Louis."

"You are mistaken, Florestan. My father is worth over two millions."

"Your father!" exclaimed Saint-Herem, in profound astonishment. "Your father?"

"Yes. In some mysterious way this usurer has managed to discover a secret, of which even I had not the slightest suspicion, I assure you, so he sent for me —"

"To offer you his services, of course. He and others of his ilk are always on the lookout for hidden fortunes, and when they find them they offer to the prospective heirs such advances as will enable them to squander their wealth before they inherit it. So you are rich, my dear Louis! You need not feel any doubts on the subject. If Porquin has made you such an offer, he knows it for a certainty."

"Yes, I think so, too," said Louis, almost sadly.

"Why do you speak so mournfully, Louis? One would suppose that you had just made some terrible discovery. What is the matter with you? What is the meaning of those tears I saw in your eyes a little while

ago? And of that exclamation, 'I am very miserable!' You miserable, and why?"

"Do not ridicule me, my friend. The truth is, I love, and I have been deceived."

"You have a rival, then, I suppose."

"Yes, and, to crown my misfortunes, this rival — "

"Go on."

"Is this rascally usurer."

"Porquin, that old scoundrel! The girl prefers him to you? Impossible! But what leads you to suppose — "

"Several suspicious circumstances; besides, he says so."

"Fine authority that! He lies, I am certain of it."

"But, Florestan, he is rich, and the girl I loved, or rather whom I still love in spite of myself, is terribly poor."

"The devil!"

"Besides, she has an invalid connection to take care of. This scoundrel's offers must have dazzled the poor child, or want may have induced her to listen to the voice of the tempter, as so many others do. What does the discovery of this wealth profit me now? I care nothing for it if I cannot share it with Mariette."

"Listen, Louis, I know you, and I feel confident that you must have placed your affections wisely."

"Yes; and for more than a year Mariette has given every proof of her faithful attachment to me, but yesterday, without the slightest warning, came a letter breaking our engagement."

"A good girl who has loved a man as poor as you were faithfully for a year would not have been so quickly won over by the promises of an old villain like Porquin. He lied to you; I haven't a doubt of it."

Then calling out at the top of his voice, to the great surprise of Louis, he exclaimed:

"Commandant de la Miraudière, come here a minute!"

"What are you going to do, Florestan?" asked Louis, as the usurer appeared in the doorway.

"Keep still and let me manage this affair," replied his friend. Then, turning to the usurer, he continued:

"M. de la Miraudière, I feel sure that you must be labouring under a misapprehension in relation to a very nice young girl who — according to your account — has fallen a victim to your charms. Will you do me the favour to tell me the truth so I may know what action to take in the matter?"

Concluding that it would be politic to sacrifice a caprice that he had little chance of gratifying to the advantage of having Louis Richard for a client, Porquin replied:

"I must confess that I deeply deplore a stupid jest that seems to have annoyed M. Richard so much."

"I told you so," remarked Florestan, turning to his friend. "And now M. le commandant must do me the favour to explain how the idea of this stupid jest, or rather what I should call an atrocious calumny, happened to occur to him."

"The explanation is very simple, monsieur. I saw Mlle. Mariette several times in the establishment where she is employed. Her beauty struck me. I asked for her address, secured it, and, finding her godmother at home when I called, I proposed to her that —"

"Enough, monsieur, enough!" cried Louis, indignantly.

"Permit me to add, however, that the aforesaid godmother declined my offer, and that the young lady, herself, chancing to come about that time, coolly ordered me out of the house. I am making a frank confession, you see, M. de Saint-Herem. I do it, I admit, in the hope that it will gain me M. Richard's confidence, and that he will decide to accept my services. As for you, M. de Saint-Herem," continued the usurer, in his most ingratiating manner, "I have examined the securities you sub-

mitted to me, and I will bring you the money you want this evening. And, by the way, when you hear the offer I have made to M. Richard, I feel confident that you will consider my terms very reasonable."

"I do not want your money, monsieur," said Louis, "and I consider it an insult for you to think me capable of trading upon my father's death, as it were — "

"But, my dear client, permit me to say — "

"Come, Florestan, let us go," Louis said to his friend, without paying the slightest attention to the usurer's protest.

"You see, my too dear M. Porquin," said Saint-Herem, as he turned to depart, "you see there are still a few honest men and women left in the world. It is useless to hope that this discovery will serve either as an example or a lesson for you, however. You are too set in your ways ever to reform; but it is some comfort to know of your double defeat."

"Ah, my dear Florestan," remarked Louis, as they left the house, "thanks to you, I am much less miserable. The fact that Mariette treated this villain with the scorn he deserved is some comfort, even though she has decided to break her engagement with me."

"Did she tell you so?"

"No, she wrote me to that effect, or rather she got some other person to do it for her."

"What, she got some other person to write such a thing as that for her!"

"You will sneer, perhaps, but the poor girl I love can neither read nor write."

"How fortunate you are! You will at least escape such epistles as I have been receiving from a pretty little perfumer I took away from a rich but miserly old banker. I have been amusing myself by showing her a little of the world, — it is so pleasant to see people happy, — but I have not been able to improve her grammar, and such spelling! It is of the antediluvian type. Mother Eve

must have written in much the same fashion. But if your Mariette can neither read nor write, how do you know but her secretary may have distorted the facts?"

"With what object?"

"I don't know, I am sure. But why don't you have an explanation with her? You will know exactly how you stand, then."

"But she implored me, both for the sake of her peace of mind and her future, to make no attempt to see her again."

"On the contrary, see her again, and at once, for the sake of her future, now you are a prospective millionaire."

"You are right, Florestan, I will see her, and at once; and if this cruel mystery can be satisfactorily explained, if I find her as loving and devoted as in the past, I shall be the happiest man in the world. Poor child, her life up to this time has been one of toil and privation. She shall know rest and comfort now, for I cannot doubt that my father will consent. My God!"

"What is the matter?"

"All this has made me entirely forget something that will surprise you very much. My father insists that I shall marry your cousin."

"What cousin?"

"Mlle. Ramon. A short time ago I went to Dreux; in fact, I have just returned from there. I had not the slightest suspicion of my father's plans, when I first saw the young lady, but, even if I had not been in love with Mariette, your uncle's daughter impressed me so unfavourably that nothing in the world —"

"So my uncle is not ruined, as he pretended he was several years ago," said Florestan, interrupting his friend. "No, evidently not, for if your father wishes you to marry my cousin, it is because he thinks such an alliance would be to your advantage. Doubtless my uncle's pretended failure was only a subterfuge."

"My father resorted to the same expedient, I think, though he has always given me to understand that extreme poverty was the cause of the parsimonious manner in which we lived."

"Ah, Uncle Ramon, I knew that you were sulky, ill-tempered, and detestable generally, but I did not believe you capable of such cleverness of conception. From this day on I shall admire and revere you. I am not your heir, it is true, but it is always delightful to know that one has a millionaire uncle. It is such a comforting thought in one's financial difficulties; one can indulge in all sorts of delightful hypotheses, in which apoplexy and even cholera present themselves to the mind in the guise of guardian angels."

"Without going quite as far as that, and without wishing for any one's death," said Louis, smiling, "I must admit that I would much rather see your uncle's fortune pass into your hands than into those of his odious daughter. You would at least enjoy the possession of it, and, with all that wealth, I feel sure that you would — "

"Contract debts without number," Saint-Herem interrupted, majestically.

"What, Florestan, with a fortune like that — "

"I should contract debts without number, I tell you. Yes, of course I should."

"What, with a fortune of two or three million francs?"

"With ten, even twenty millions, I should still contract debts. My theory is that of the government, — the larger a country's debt, the better that country's credit is. But I will expound my financial theories some other time. Don't lose a moment now in hastening to Mariette, and be sure and tell me what success you meet with. Here it is nearly noon, and I promised the little perfumer — who amuses me immensely — that she should try a new saddle-horse to-day, the handsomest

hack in Paris, — it cost me a nice price, by the way, — and she wrote me this morning to remind me that I had promised to take her to the Bois. So hasten to your Mariette. I feel confident that your love affair will end happily after all. But write to me, or else come and see me as soon as possible, for I shall be so anxious to hear the result of your interview."

"You shall hear from me, my dear Florestan, whatever happens."

"Farewell then, my dear Louis, it is agreed that I shall see or hear from you before to-morrow."

As he spoke, M. de Saint-Herem stepped into the handsomely appointed brougham which was waiting for him at the usurer's door, and Louis Richard wended his way on foot to Mariette's home.

CHAPTER X.

THE MYSTERY EXPLAINED.

WHEN Louis Richard entered the room occupied by Mariette and her godmother, he paused a moment on the threshold, overwhelmed with grief and despair at the affecting scene that presented itself to his gaze.

Mariette was lying to all appearance lifeless on a mattress on the floor. Her features, which were overspread with a death-like pallor, contracted convulsively from time to time. Her eyes were closed, and there were still traces of tears on her marble cheeks, while in one of the clenched hands crossed upon her breast was the envelope containing the fragments of the letter she had received from Louis.

Madame Lacombe's usually grim and sardonic face showed that she was a prey to the most poignant grief and distress. Kneeling beside the mattress on which her goddaughter was lying, she was supporting Mariette's head upon her mutilated arm, and holding a glass of water to the girl's inanimate lips with the other.

Hearing a sound, Madame Lacombe turned hastily, and her features resumed their usually hard and irascible expression, as she saw Louis standing motionless in the doorway.

"What do you want?" she demanded, brusquely. "Why do you come in without knocking? I don't know you. Who are you?"

"My God! in what a terrible condition I find her!" exclaimed Louis.

And without paying any attention to Madame Lacombe's question, he sprang forward, and, throwing himself on his knees beside the pallet, exclaimed, imploringly:

"What is the matter, Mariette? Answer me, I beseech you."

Madame Lacombe, who had been as much surprised as annoyed at the young man's intrusion, now scrutinised his features closely, and, after a moment's reflection, said, sullenly:

"You are Louis Richard, I suppose?"

"Yes, madame, but in Heaven's name what has happened to Mariette?"

"You have killed her, that is all!"

"I? Great God! But, madame, something must be done. Let me run for a doctor. Her hands are like ice. Mariette, Mariette! Oh, my God! my God! she does not hear me."

"She has been in this state ever since last night, and it was your letter that caused it."

"My letter! What letter?"

"Oh, you intend to deny it now, I suppose. You needn't, for last night the poor child couldn't bear it any longer, and told me all."

"Great Heavens! What did she tell you?"

"That you never wanted to lay eyes on her again, and that you had deserted her for another. That is always the way with you men!"

"On the contrary, I wrote to Mariette that —"

"You lie!" exclaimed the old woman, more and more incensed. "She told me what was in the letter. She has it here in her hand. I haven't been able to get it away from her. Hadn't she enough to bear without your treating her in this way? Get out of this house, you scoundrel! Mariette was a fool, and so was I, to refuse the offer made us, and I told her so at the time. 'See how we shall be rewarded for our honesty,' I said to

her. And my words have come true. She is dying, and I shall be turned out into the street, for we are behind in our rent, and the little furniture we have will be taken from us. Fortunately, I have a quarter of a bushel of charcoal left," she added, with a grim smile, "and charcoal is the friend and deliverer of the poor."

"This is horrible!" cried Louis, unable to restrain his tears; "but I swear to you that we are all the victims of a most deplorable mistake. Mariette, Mariette, arouse yourself! It is I — I, Louis!"

"You are determined to kill her, I see!" exclaimed Madame Lacombe, making a desperate effort to push the young man away. "If she recovers consciousness, the sight of you will finish her!"

"Thank God!" exclaimed Louis, resisting Madame Lacombe's efforts, and again bending over Mariette; "she is moving a little. See! her hands are relaxing; her eyelids are quivering. Mariette, darling, can't you hear me? It is Louis who speaks to you."

The girl was, in fact, gradually recovering consciousness, and her tear-stained eyes, after having slowly opened and wandered aimlessly around for a moment, fixed themselves upon Louis. Soon, an expression of joyful surprise irradiated her features, and she murmured, faintly:

"Louis, is it really you? Ah, I never expected —"

Then, the sad reality gradually forcing itself upon her mind, she averted her face, and, letting her head again fall upon Madame Lacombe's bosom, she said, with a deep sigh:

"Ah, godmother, it is for the last time! All is over between us!"

"Didn't I tell you how it would be?" exclaimed Madame Lacombe. "Go, I tell you, go! Oh, the misery of being so weak and infirm that one cannot turn a scoundrel out of one's house!"

"Mariette," cried Louis, imploringly, "Mariette, in

pity, listen to me. I do not come to bid you farewell; on the contrary, I come to tell you that I love you better than ever!"

"Good God!" exclaimed the young girl, starting up as if she had received an electric shock; "what does he say?"

"I say that we are both the victims of a terrible mistake, Mariette. I have never for one moment ceased to love you, no, never! and all the time I have been away I have had but one thought and desire, — to see you again and make all the necessary arrangements for our speedy marriage, as I told you in my letter."

"Your letter!" exclaimed Mariette, in heart-broken tones, "he has forgotten. Here, Louis, here is your letter."

And, as she spoke, she handed the young man the crumpled, tear-blurred fragments of the letter.

"He will deny his own writing, see if he don't," muttered Madame Lacombe, as Louis hastily put the torn pieces together. "And you will be fool enough to believe him."

"This is what I wrote, Mariette," said Louis, after he had put the letter together:

"'My Dearest Mariette: — I shall be with you again the day after you receive this letter. The short absence, from which I have suffered so much, has convinced me that it is impossible for me to live separated from you. Thank God! the day of our union is near at hand. To-morrow will be the sixth of May, and as soon as I return I shall tell my father of our intentions, and I do not doubt his consent.

"'Farewell, then, until day after to-morrow, my beloved Mariette. I love you madly, or rather wisely, for what greater wisdom could a man show than in having sought and found happiness in a love like yours.

"'Yours devotedly, Louis.

"'I write only these few lines because I shall reach Paris almost as soon as my letter, and because it is always painful to me to think that another must read what I write to you. But for that, how many things I would say to you. Yours for ever.

"'L.'"

Mariette had listened to the letter with such profound astonishment that she had been unable to utter a word.

"That, Mariette, is what I wrote," remarked Louis. "What was there in my letter to make you so wretched?"

"Is that really what was in the letter, M. Louis?" asked Madame Lacombe.

"See for yourself, madame," said Louis, handing her the scraps of paper.

"Do you suppose I know how to read?" was the surly response. "How was it that the letter was read so differently to Mariette, then?"

"Who read my letter to you, Mariette?" asked Louis.

"A scrivener."

"A scrivener!" repeated Louis, assailed by a sudden suspicion. "Explain, Mariette, I beg of you."

"The explanation is very simple, M. Louis. I asked a scrivener on the Charnier des Innocents to write a letter to you. He wrote it, and just as he was about to put your address on it he overturned his inkstand on the letter, and was obliged to write it all over again. On my return home, I found your letter waiting for me; but having no one to read it to me in Augustine's absence, I went back to the scrivener, a very kind and respectable old man, and asked him to read what you had written to me. He read it, or at least pretended to read it, for, according to him, you said that we must never meet again, that your future and that of your father demanded it, and for that reason you entreated me—"

But the poor girl's emotion overcame her, and she burst into tears.

Louis understood now that chance had led Mariette to his father for assistance, that the pretended accident had been merely a stratagem that enabled the scrivener to write a second letter of an entirely different import from the first, and to address it, not to Dreux, but to Paris, so Louis would find it on his arrival in that city. He understood, too, his father's object in thus deceiving Mariette in regard to the real contents of the second letter, when she again applied to him. The discovery of this breach of confidence on the part of his father — the reason of which was only too apparent — overwhelmed Louis with sorrow and shame. He dared not confess to his sweetheart the relation that existed between him and the scrivener, but, wishing to give the two women some plausible explanation of the deception that had been practised upon them, he said:

"In spite of this scrivener's apparent kindness of heart, he must have taken a malicious pleasure in playing a joke upon you, my poor Mariette, for he read you the exact opposite of what I had written."

"How shameful!" cried the girl. "How could he have had the heart to deceive me so? He had such a benevolent air, and spoke so feelingly of the sympathy he always felt for those unfortunate persons who, like myself, could neither read nor write."

"But you can see for yourself that he did deceive you shamefully? Still, what does it matter, now?" added Louis, anxious to put an end to such a painful topic. "We understand each other's feelings now, Mariette, and —"

"One moment," interposed Madame Lacombe; "you may feel satisfied and reassured, Mariette, but I do not."

"What do you mean, godmother?"

"I mean that I strongly disapprove of this marriage."

"But listen, madame," pleaded Louis.

"As you are the son of a public scrivener, you haven't a sou to your name. Mariette hasn't, either, and two people in such circumstances as that have no right to marry. My goddaughter has me to take care of. She would be sure, too, to have a lot of children, and a nice fix we should all be in!"

"But, godmother —"

"Don't talk to me. I know what you intend to do. The first thing you'll try for is to get rid of the old woman. There won't be bread enough for us all, and I shall be turned out into the street to be arrested as a public vagabond. I shall be sent to the workhouse, so you won't be troubled with me any more. Oh, yes, I understand your scheme."

"Oh, godmother, how can you imagine such a thing as that?"

"Dismiss all such fears from your mind, I beg of you, madame," Louis made haste to say. "This very day I made a most unexpected discovery. My father, for reasons which I must respect, has concealed from me the fact that we are rich, very rich."

Mariette manifested much more astonishment than delight on hearing this startling announcement, but turning to Madame Lacombe after a moment, she said:

"You see you need be troubled by no more of these terrible misgivings in regard to my future, godmother."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Madame Lacombe, sardonically; "so she really believes it —"

"But, godmother —"

"Nonsense, child, can't you see that he has invented this story so I will consent to your marriage?"

"But I swear, madame —"

"I tell you it is all a lie," exclaimed Madame Lacombe; "for if you were as rich as you say, you wouldn't want Mariette any longer. Would the son of a rich man be fool enough to marry a poor working girl who can neither read nor write?"

Though she did not exactly share her godmother's doubts, Mariette gazed at Louis a little sadly and uneasily, as she thought of the great change in his fortunes.

The young man must have understood the meaning of the look, for he said:

"You are very much mistaken, Madame Lacombe; the son of a rich man keeps the promise he made as a poor man when the happiness of his life depends upon that promise."

"Bah! that is all talk!" interrupted the invalid, in surly tones; "but rich or poor, you won't get Mariette without I am sure of a living. I don't ask much, — six hundred francs a year will do, — but the money must be deposited in the hands of a reliable notary before the marriage contract is signed."

"Oh, godmother, have you no more confidence in Louis than that?"

"A nice fix you'll find yourself in if you place confidence in any man," exclaimed the poor creature. "Oh, I know all about it. Before marriage they'll promise anything you ask; afterward, they'll take the old woman by the arm, and drag her off to the poorhouse without saying so much as by your leave. I'm not afraid that Mariette would turn me into the street. I've been a sad burden to her, and she has had quite enough of me, I know, but she is a kind-hearted little thing; besides, she's afraid of me; but once married, she will side with her husband, and out I shall have to go. No, there sha'n't be any marriage unless I'm sure of six hundred francs a year."

While Madame Lacombe was indulging in these recriminations, Mariette and Louis exchanged sadly significant glances.

"You hear her, Louis," the girl seemed to say. "Was I not right when I told you that she had been hopelessly embittered by her many misfortunes?"

"Poor Mariette," the young man seemed to say in

reply, "how much you must have suffered! And how hard it is to see such tender and saint-like devotion as yours rewarded in such a way!"

"Madame," replied Louis, when the sick woman had ended her tirade, "you may rest assured that you shall be well provided for. Mariette and I will never forget that you took her in when she had no other home, and whether you prefer to live with us, or to live alone, you shall be made comfortable for life."

"Oh, thank you, Louis, thank you for sharing my feeling for my poor godmother, my second mother," exclaimed Mariette, gratefully.

And the girl bent over Madame Lacombe to embrace her, but the invalid, pushing her away, said, angrily:

"Can't you see that he is only amusing himself at our expense? Marry you? Pension me for life? Was such a thing ever heard of? He wants to get around me, that is all, and if he is rich, as he says he is, he will only fool you, and some fine day you'll hear of his marriage with another girl, so I forbid him ever to set foot in this house again."

"But you will at least allow me to present myself here in company with my father to make a formal request for Mariette's hand in marriage?"

"Oh, yes, when you come for that purpose it will be when two Sundays come together," answered the old woman, sneeringly.

"It will be to-morrow, Madame Lacombe."

Then, turning to the young girl, he added:

"Farewell, Mariette. I shall come to-morrow, accompanied by my father."

On hastening to his father's office a few moments afterward, Louis found it closed, and ascertained upon inquiry that M. Richard had not been there at all that day. Amazed at this strange change in the old man's regular habits, Louis hastened to the lodgings they shared in the Rue de Grenelle.

CHAPTER XI.

HIDDEN TREASURE.

As Louis was passing the porter's lodge, that functionary remarked to him:

"Your father went out a couple of hours ago, M. Louis. He left this note for you, which I was to take to the office where you are employed, if you did not return before two o'clock in the afternoon."

The young man took the note. It read as follows:

"My Dear Son: — I am in receipt of a few lines from my friend, Ramon, who apprises me of his intention of leaving Dreux in company with his daughter almost simultaneously with his letter. He will, consequently, reach Paris to-day. As he has never been on a railway in his life, and is anxious to try that mode of travel, he will stop at Versailles, and he wishes us to meet him there. We can visit the palace, and afterward come on to Paris together by one of the late trains.

"I am to meet Ramon at the Hôtel du Reservoir. If we should leave there to visit the palace before you arrive, you can easily find us. It is understood that this meeting with Mlle. Ramon is not to compromise you in the least. I merely desire that you should take advantage of this opportunity to see the injustice of your prejudice against that young lady. Besides, whatever your plans may be, you must realise that it would be very dis-

courteous to Ramon, one of my most particular friends, to fail to keep the appointment he has made with us. So come, my dear Louis, if only for appearance's sake.

"From your father who loves you, and who has but one desire in the world, — your happiness.

"A. RICHARD."

But Louis, in spite of the deference he usually showed to his father's wishes, did not go to Versailles, feeling the utter uselessness of another meeting with Mlle. Ramon, as he was now even more than ever determined to marry Mariette.

The discovery of his father's wealth made no change in the industrious habits of Louis, who hastened to the office to perform his usual duties, and apologise for his absence during the morning. A desire to atone for that, as well as the preparation of several important documents, kept him at the office much later than usual. As he was preparing to leave, one of his fellow clerks rushed in excitedly, exclaiming:

"Ah, my friend, such a terrible calamity has occurred!"

"What has happened?"

"There has been a frightful accident on the Versailles railroad."

"Good God!" exclaimed Louis, turning pale.

"The Paris train was derailed, several cars were telescoped, they took fire, nearly all the passengers were either crushed or burned to death, and — "

Louis could wait to hear no more. Forgetting his hat entirely, he rushed out of the office, and, running to a neighbouring cab-stand, he sprang into one of the vehicles, saying to the coachman:

"Twenty francs *pourboire* if you take me to the Versailles railway station at the top of your speed, — and from there, but I don't know yet, — only start, in Heaven's name start at once!"

"On the right or left bank of the river, monsieur?" asked the coachman, gathering up the lines.

"What?"

"There are two roads, monsieur, one on the right, the other on the left bank of the river."

"I want to go to the road where that terrible accident just occurred."

"This is the first I have heard of it, monsieur."

Louis drove back to the office to inquire of the fellow clerk who had brought the news, but, finding no one there, he ran out and was about to enter the cab again when the driver said:

"I have just learned that the accident was on the left line, monsieur."

Louis accordingly ordered him to drive to that station. Here the sad news was confirmed. He also learned at what point on the line the accident had occurred. The main road and then a cross road enabled him to reach Bas Mendon about nightfall, and, guided by the blaze of the burning cars, he soon found the scene of the catastrophe.

The press of the time gave such graphic accounts of this frightful calamity that is not necessary to enter into further particulars; we will merely say that all night Louis searched in vain for his father among the charred, disfigured, and terribly mutilated bodies. About four o'clock in the morning the young man, overcome with grief and fatigue, returned to Paris, with a faint hope that his father might have been one of the few who had escaped injury, and that he might have returned home during the night.

The carriage had scarcely reached the house before Louis sprang out and ran to the porter's lodge.

"Has my father returned?" he exclaimed.

"No, M. Louis."

"Ah! there can be no further doubt, then," murmured Louis. "Dead! dead!"

His knees gave way under him, and he was obliged to sit down. After resting a few moments in the room of the porter, who offered him the usual condolences, Louis went slowly up to his room.

On seeing the bare, poorly furnished room so long shared with a father who had loved him so devotedly, and who had just met with such a frightful death, Louis's grief became uncontrollable, and he threw himself down on the bed, and, burying his face in his hands, wept long and bitterly.

About half an hour afterward he heard some one knock at the door, and the porter entered.

"What do you want?" asked Louis.

"I am sorry to disturb you at such a time, monsieur, but the coachman —"

"What coachman?" asked Louis, who in his grief had forgotten all about the carriage.

"Why, the coachman you kept all night. He says you promised him twenty francs drink money, which, with his charge for yesterday afternoon and last night, makes forty-nine francs in all that you owe him, and he wants his money."

"Pay him and let him go!" responded the young man, with sorrowful impatience.

"But forty-nine francs is a large sum of money, and I haven't that much, M. Louis."

"Good Heavens! what is to be done?" exclaimed Louis, suddenly aroused by this demand of the material interests of life. "I have no money, either."

And he spoke the truth, for he had never had at his disposal one-fourth of the amount that he owed the coachman.

"Then why did you keep the carriage so long, and above all, why did you promise the driver such a large *pourboire?* You must be mad! What are you going to do? Hadn't you better see if there is any money in your father's desk?"

These last words reminded Louis of a fact which, in his grief, he had entirely forgotten. His father was rich, and thinking that there might be some money concealed somewhere in the room, but not wishing to institute a search for it in the porter's presence, he said:

"I may need the cab again this morning, so tell the man to wait. If I am not down in half an hour, you can come back again, and I will give you the money."

The porter went out, and the young man, thus left alone, experienced a feeling almost akin to remorse, as he thought of the search he was about to make, — a search which at such a moment seemed almost sacrilege, but necessity left him no choice.

The furniture of the room consisted of a writing-desk, a bureau, and a big chest similar to those seen in the houses of well-to-do peasants, and which was divided into two compartments, one above the other.

Louis examined the desk and bureau, but found no money in either of them. The keys of the chest were in their respective locks. He opened both compartments, but saw only a few articles of clothing. A long drawer separated the two compartments. In this drawer there was nothing except a few unimportant papers; but the idea that there might be some secret compartment occurred to Louis, so he took the drawer out of the chest, and proceeded to examine it. A careful search resulted in the discovery of a small brass knob in the left side of the drawer. He pressed this knob, and immediately saw the board which apparently formed the bottom of the drawer move slowly out, disclosing to view another opening below, about four inches deep, and extending the entire length of the drawer. This space was partitioned off into a number of small compartments, and each of these compartments was filled with piles of gold pieces of different denominations and nationalities. It was evident that each coin must have been carefully

polished, for they all sparkled as brilliantly as if they had just come out of the mint.

Louis, in spite of his profound grief, stood a moment as if dazzled at the sight of this treasure, the value of which he knew must be very considerable. On recovering from his surprise a little, he noticed a paper in the first compartment, and, recognising his father's handwriting, he read these words:

"This collection of gold pieces was begun on the 7th of September, 1803. Its market value is 287,634 francs, 10 centimes. See Clause IV. of my will, entrusted to the keeping of Master Marainville, No. 28 Rue St. Anne, with whom is likewise deposited all my title-deeds, mortgages, stocks, and bonds. See also the sealed envelope under the piles of Spanish double pistoles, in fifth compartment."

Louis removed several piles of the large, heavy coins designated, and found an envelope sealed with black.

Upon this envelope was written in bold characters:

"*To My Dearly-beloved Son.*"

Just as Louis picked up the envelope some one knocked at the door, and remembering that he had told the porter to return, he had barely time to take out one of the coins and close the chest before that functionary entered.

The porter examined the coin which the young man handed to him with quite as much surprise as curiosity, exclaiming, with a wondering air:

"What a handsome gold piece! One would suppose it had just been coined. I never saw one like it before."

"Go and pay the cabman with it!"

"But how much is a big gold piece like this worth, monsieur?"

"More than I owe. Go and get it changed, and pay the coachman."

"Did your father leave many of these big gold pieces,

M. Richard?" asked the porter, in a mysterious tone. "Who would have supposed that old man —"

"Go!" thundered Louis, exasperated at the heartlessness of the question, "go and pay the coachman, and don't come back."

The porter beat a hasty retreat, and Louis, to guard against further intrusion, locked the door and returned to the chest.

Before opening his father's letter the young man, almost in spite of himself, gazed for a moment at the glittering treasure, but this time, though he reproached himself for the thought at such a moment, he remembered Mariette, and said to himself that one-fourth of the wealth that was lying there before him would assure his wife's comfort and independence for life.

Then he tried to forget the cruel stratagem his father had resorted to, and even comforted himself with the thought that he should have secured the old man's consent to his marriage with Mariette eventually, and that, though he might not have confessed to the wealth he possessed, he would at least have provided comfortably for the young couple.

The discovery of this treasure excited in Louis's breast none of that avaricious or revengeful joy that the heirs of misers often feel when they think of the cruel privations a parent's avarice has imposed upon them.

On the contrary, it was with devout respect that the young man broke the seal of the letter which doubtless contained his aged father's last wishes.

CHAPTER XII.

A VOICE FROM THE GRAVE.

THIS communication, dated about two months before, read as follows:

"MY BELOVED SON: — When you read these lines I shall have ceased to live.

"You have always believed me to be poor; on the contrary, I leave you a large fortune accumulated by avarice.

"I have been a miser. I do not deny it. On the contrary, I glory in the fact.

"And these are my reasons:

"Up to the time of your birth, — which deprived me of your mother, — I had, without being extravagant, been indifferent about increasing either my own patrimony or the dowry my wife had brought me; but as soon as I had a son, that desire to make ample provision for him which is the sacred duty of every parent gradually aroused a spirit of economy, then of parsimony, and finally of avarice, in my breast.

"Besides, the privations I imposed upon myself did not affect you in your infancy. Born sturdy and robust, the wholesome simplicity of your bringing up was rather beneficial than otherwise, tending as it did to the development of an excellent constitution.

"When you were old enough to begin your education, I sent you to one of the best schools open to the poor, at first, I must admit, purely from motives of economy, but afterward, because I considered such a training the

best preparation for an honest, industrious life. The success of this plan even exceeded my expectations. Reared with the children of the poor, you acquired none of those luxurious, extravagant tastes, and felt none of the bitter envy and jealousy, that so often exert a fatal influence upon a young man's future. You were thus spared much of the chagrin which is no less bitter because the victim of it is a child.

"It is generally supposed that because children of entirely different conditions in life wear the same uniform, eat at the same table, and pursue the same studies, a feeling of equality exists between them.

"This is a great mistake.

"Social inequality is as keenly felt among children as in the social world.

"The son of a wealthy tradesman or a great nobleman generally displays the same pride and arrogance at ten years of age as at twenty-five.

"As for you, reared with children of the people, you heard them all talk of the hard toil of their parents, and the necessity of labour was thus impressed upon your mind almost from infancy.

"Other schoolmates told of the privations and poverty which the members of their households were obliged to endure, and in this way you became accustomed to our poverty.

"At the age of fifteen, I made you compete for a scholarship in the admirable institution in which you completed your studies, and your early education already began to bear excellent fruits, for, though many of your schoolmates were wealthy or of noble lineage, contact with them never impaired your sterling qualities, or made you envious or discontented.

"At the age of seventeen you entered the office of a notary, an intimate friend of mine, who alone knows the secret of my great wealth, and who has charge of my investments. Up to this time, this friend's discretion

has equalled his devotion, and, thanks to him, you have acquired a fair knowledge of law, and also of business methods, which will be of immense service to you in the management of the very handsome property I have amassed.

"My conscience does not reproach me in the least, consequently, though sometimes I admit I fear you may address this reproach to my memory:

"'While you were amassing all this wealth, father, how could you bear to see me subjected to such cruel privations?'

"But the recollection of the many times you have remarked to me that, though we were poor, you were perfectly contented, and that you craved wealth only for my sake, always drove this fear from my heart.

"In fact, your invariable good humour, the evenness of your disposition, your natural gaiety, and your devoted affection for me have always convinced me that you were contented with your lot; besides, I shared it. What I earned as a scrivener, together with your earnings, have enabled us to live without touching any of the income from my property, which has consequently been accumulating in prudent hands for the last twenty years, so at this present writing the fortune I leave to you amounts to over two millions and a half.

"I do not know how many more years I have to live, but if I live ten years longer I shall have reached the allotted age of man. You will be thirty-five, and I shall have amassed a fortune of four or five millions, as property doubles itself in ten years.

"So, in all probability, you will have reached middle age when you come into possession of this large property, and the sober, frugal, and laborious habits acquired in infancy will have become second nature with you; so will you not be in the best possible condition to inherit the wealth I have amassed for you, and to use it wisely and well?

"If I had acted differently, what benefit would have accrued to either of us?

"If I had been lavish in my expenditures, I should have reduced you to poverty.

"If I had contented myself with spending my income only, then, instead of devoting ourselves to some useful employment, we should probably have led idle, aimless lives; instead of living frugally, we should have indulged in luxuries and more or less vain display; in short, we should have led such a life as nearly all wealthy people of the middle class lead.

"And what should we have gained by it?

"Should we have been better or more useful citizens? I doubt it, and, at my death, I should have left you a small property, not sufficient for the realisation of any extensive or generous enterprise.

"One word more, my dear child, to answer in advance any reproach that you may in future address to my memory.

"Rest assured if I kept my wealth a secret from you, it was not from any desire to deceive you, nor from any distrust on my part.

"These were my reasons:

"Ignorant of my wealth, you were resigned to poverty; aware of our wealth, you might have accepted the humble existence I imposed upon you without murmuring, but in your secret heart you might have accused me of cruelty and selfishness.

"Nor was this all. Forgive, my son, this foolish fear, — this apprehension so insulting to your affectionate heart, — but during my lifetime I was loath that you should know that you would profit by my death.

"Another, and possibly the most potent reason of all, led me to conceal my wealth from you. I love you so much that it would have been impossible for me to see you subjected to the slightest privation had you known

it depended only upon me to give you an easier, broader, and more luxurious life.

"In spite of the apparent contradiction between this feeling and my avaricious conduct toward you, I hope that you will understand me.

"And now that in thought I place myself face to face with death, which may strike me down to-morrow, to-day, this very hour, I solemnly declare that I bless you from the inmost depths of my soul, my beloved son. You have never given me one moment's pain or sorrow, but only joy and happiness.

"God for ever bless you, my good and loving son. If you are as happy as you deserve to be, the dearest wish of my heart will be gratified.

"Your father, A. RICHARD.

"*Paris, February* 25, 18—."

Deeply touched by this strange letter, Louis fell into a deep, sad reverie, and the day was nearing a close when the young man heard some one knock at the door of his garret, and the well-known voice of Florestan de Saint-Herem greeted his ears.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MISER EXTOLLED.

SAINT-HEREM threw himself in his friend's arms, exclaiming:

"Louis, my poor friend, I know all. The porter just told me of your father's death. What a sudden and cruel blow!"

"Read this, Florestan, and you will understand how bitter my regret must be!" said Louis, brokenly, handing Saint-Herem the dead man's letter.

"Now do you think any one can blame my father for his avarice?" Louis asked, when his friend had finished the letter. "His one thought seems to have been to enrich me, and to prepare me to make a good use of the large property he would bequeath to me. It was for my sake that he hoarded his wealth, and imposed the hardest privations upon himself!"

"No sacrifice is too great for a miser," replied Florestan. "Misers are capable of the grandest and most heroic acts. This may seem a paradox to you, but it is true, nevertheless. The prejudice against misers is unjust in the extreme. Misers! Why, we ought to erect altars to them!" added Saint-Herem, with growing enthusiasm. "Is it not wonderful the ingenuity they display in devising all sorts of ways to save? Is it not marvellous to see them accumulating, by persistent efforts, a fortune from the ends of matches and the collecting of lost pins. And people deny the existence of alchemists, and of discoverers of the philosopher's stone!

Why, the miser has found the philosopher's stone, for does he not make gold out of what would be worthless to others?"

"You are right in that respect, Florestan."

"In that respect and all other respects, for, Louis, observe my simile closely. It is wonderfully just and worthy of my best rhetorical efforts. There is a dry and sterile tract of land. Some one digs a well there. What is the result? The smallest springs, the almost imperceptible oozings from the earth, the tiniest threads of water, accumulate drop by drop in this well. Gradually the water deepens, the reservoir becomes full, then comes a beneficent hand that diffuses the contents all around, and flowers and verdure spring up as if by enchantment on this once barren soil. Say, Louis, is not my comparison a just one? Is not the wealth amassed by the miser almost always spent in luxuries of every kind? for, as the proverb says: 'An avaricious father, a spendthrift son.' And let us consider the miser from a religious point of view."

"From a religious point of view?"

"Yes; for it is seen from that standpoint that he is especially worthy of praise."

"That is a very difficult assertion to prove, it seems to me."

"On the contrary, it is extremely easy. Self-abnegation is one of the greatest of virtues, is it not?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Well, my dear Louis, I defy you to mention any monastic order whose members renounce all earthly pleasures as absolutely as the majority of misers do. Capuchins renounce champagne, race-horses, dancing girls, hunting, cards, and the opera. I should think so. Most of them have good reasons for it. But how different with the miser! There, in his coffers, under lock and key, are the means of gratifying every wish and indulging in every luxury and pleasure, and yet he pos-

sesses the moral courage and strength of will to resist all these temptations. In his disinterestedness, too, the miser is sublime."

"Disinterestedness, Florestan?"

"Yes, I repeat that his disinterestedness is sublime. He knows perfectly well that he is execrated during life, and that his heirs will dance upon his grave when he is dead. He knows all that, and yet, mention a single case where a miser has tried to take his treasure with him, though it would be an easy matter, as it wouldn't take five minutes to burn two millions in bank-notes. But no, these kind-hearted misers, full of compassion, practise forgiveness of injuries, and leave their vast wealth to their heirs in almost every case."

"But, my friend, it sounds very strangely to hear a person who spends money as lavishly as you do lauding avarice to the skies."

"All the more reason that I should."

"And why?"

"Who can appreciate the excellence of the armourer's work as well as the warrior? the excellence of a horse as well the rider? the excellence of a musical instrument as well as the person who plays upon it? Pope Paganini has canonised Stradivarius, the maker of those wonderful violins the great artist plays so divinely; and I, who could spend millions so admirably, shall certainly feel like canonising my uncle — that heroic martyr to avarice — if Fate so wills that the means of prodigality which he had been accumulating penny by penny ever falls into my hands."

"My God!"

"What is the matter, Louis?"

"Then you do not know —"

"What?"

"I told you of my poor father's desire for a marriage between me and your cousin."

"Yes, what of it?"

"Your uncle, ignorant of my refusal, and anxious to hasten this union which he desired as ardently as my father, apparently, left Dreux yesterday, in company with his daughter, and this morning — "

"Both arrived in Paris, I suppose. Why this hesitation, my dear Louis?"

"Your uncle and cousin did not come straight through to Paris. They stopped at Versailles, Florestan, at Versailles, where my poor father went to — "

But Louis could not finish the sentence. His emotion overcame him completely.

"Courage, my friend," said Saint-Herem, deeply affected, "I understand your feelings."

"Florestan," said the young man, drying his tears, after a long silence, "my father went to Versailles to meet your uncle and cousin."

"Well?"

"It was agreed that they were to accompany my father back to Paris. There is little doubt that they did so, and as it is almost certain that they were all in the same railway carriage — "

"They, too! Oh, that would be too horrible!" exclaimed Saint-Herem, covering his face with his hands.

The exclamation of horror and the tone of profound pity in Saint-Herem's voice were so sincere and so spontaneous that Louis was deeply touched by this proof of noble-heartedness on the part of his friend, who had manifested only a feeling of generous commiseration, without one particle of the satisfaction or selfish joy that might have been considered almost excusable under the circumstances.

CHAPTER XIV.

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE.

Louis and Saint-Herem remained silent for several minutes. The former was the first to speak.

"I cannot tell you how deeply your sensibility touches me, my dear Florestan," he said, at last. "It is so thoroughly in accord with my own feelings at this sad moment."

"Why, what else could you expect, my dear friend? I had no affection for my uncle, as you know, but one must be heartless, indeed, not to feel deeply grieved and horrified at the mere possibility that my relatives may have shared your poor father's cruel fate. I retract nothing I have said in regard to avarice and its far-reaching consequences, though it would have given my thoughts a much more serious turn had I foreseen that the question was to affect me personally; but I can at least say, with truth, that I am not one of those persons who receive an inheritance with unalloyed delight. Now tell me, Louis, — and forgive the necessity of a question that is sure to revive your grief, — in your sorrowful search for your father did you see nothing that would lead you to hope that my uncle and his daughter might have escaped such a horrible death?"

"All I can say, Florestan, is that I remember perfectly having seen neither your uncle nor cousin among the killed and injured. As for the unfortunate persons who shared my father's fate, it was impossible to identify any of them, as they were burned almost to ashes."

"Then your supposition is probably correct, my poor Louis, as my uncle and his daughter are almost certain to have been in the same carriage as your father, and even in the same compartment. In that case, there can be little doubt that they met with the same fate. I shall write to Dreux at once, and I shall also have a careful search for their remains instituted without delay. If you hear anything more, inform me as soon as possible. But now I think of it, how about Mariette? The sad announcement you have just made to me almost made me forget the object of my visit."

"It was a cruel misunderstanding that caused all the trouble, as I suspected, Florestan. I found her more loving and devoted than ever."

"Her love will be a great consolation to you in your deep sorrow. Courage, my poor Louis, courage! All that has occurred should only serve to strengthen the bonds of friendship between us."

"Ah, Florestan, but for this friendship and Mariette's affection, I do not know how I could endure this crushing blow. Farewell, my friend. Keep me advised of the progress of your search for your uncle, I beg of you."

The two friends separated. Left alone, Louis reflected some time in regard to the course he should pursue. Finally he placed in his satchel the hidden gold he had just discovered, then, taking his father's letter, he repaired to the house of his employer, who was also the business agent and friend of his deceased parent, as he had just learned from the letter found with the gold.

The notary, deeply affected by the harrowing details of his late patron's terrible fate, tried to console Louis, and also offered to attend to the necessary legal formalities.

This arrangement made, Louis said:

"There is another question I should like to ask. As

soon as these formalities have been complied with, do I come into possession of my father's property?"

"Certainly, my dear Louis."

"Then I will tell you what I intend to do. I have brought you gold coin to the amount of more than two hundred thousand francs. I found it in a chest in the room I occupied with my father. Out of this amount, I wish you to take enough to purchase an annuity of twelve thousand francs for the godmother of a young girl that I am about to marry."

"But does this young girl's financial condition —"

"My dear patron," interrupted Louis, respectfully but firmly, "the young girl I speak of is a working girl, and supports herself and her godmother by her daily toil. I have loved her a long time, and no human power can prevent me from marrying her."

"So be it," replied the notary, understanding the uselessness of any further protest. "I will settle the desired amount upon the person designated."

"I also desire to take from this sum of money about fifteen thousand francs to set up housekeeping in a suitable manner."

"Only fifteen thousand francs!" exclaimed the notary, surprised at the modesty of this request. "Will that be enough?"

"My affianced wife is, like myself, accustomed to a frugal and laborious life, so the income from fifteen thousand francs, together with the proceeds of our labour, will more than suffice."

"The proceeds of your labour! What! do you intend —"

"To remain in your office if you do not consider me unworthy of your confidence."

"Remain a notary's clerk when you have an income of more than two hundred thousand francs a year?"

"I cannot and will not take possession of this immense fortune for a long time to come. Even when

the death of my father has been legally established, I shall still feel a vague hope of again seeing the parent I so deeply mourn."

"Alas! I fear there is little hope of that, my poor Louis."

"Still, I shall cherish the hope as long as possible; and so long as I do, I shall not consider myself at liberty to dispose of my father's property, — at least only to the extent I have indicated to you. Will you not, therefore, continue to take charge of the estate exactly as you have done in the past?"

"I cannot but admire the course you have decided upon, my dear Louis," replied the notary, with unfeigned emotion. "Your conduct now conforms in every respect with that you have always maintained. You could not do greater honour to your father's memory than by acting thus. It shall be as you wish. I will remain the custodian of your fortune, and the annuity you spoke of shall be purchased this very day."

"There is a detail in relation to that matter, about which I should like to speak, trivial and almost absurd as it may appear to you."

"What do you mean?"

"The poor woman upon whom I desire to settle this annuity has seen so much trouble during her long life that her character has become embittered, and she feels no confidence in any one. Any promise would seem utterly valueless to her, if the promise was not based upon something tangible; so to convince the poor creature, I want to take her fifteen thousand francs in gold, which will represent very nearly the amount that will have to be expended for the annuity. It is the only way to thoroughly convince the poor creature of my good intentions."

"Take any amount you please, of course, my dear Louis. The matter shall be arranged to-morrow."

CHAPTER XV.

MADAME LACOMBE'S UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER.

On leaving the notary's office, Louis hastened to Mariette's home. He found the young girl sewing by the bedside of her godmother, who seemed to be sound asleep.

Her lover's extreme pallor, as well as the sad expression of his face, struck the young girl at once, and running toward him, she exclaimed, anxiously:

"Oh, Louis, something terrible must have happened, I am sure."

"Yes, Mariette. Have you heard of the frightful accident that occurred on the Versailles railroad yesterday?"

"Yes, it was horrible. People say there were nobody knows how many victims."

"I can hardly doubt that my father was one of the number."

Quick as thought, Mariette threw herself, sobbing, on Louis's breast, and for a long time the two stood clasped in a silent embrace. Louis was the first to speak.

"Mariette, you know how devotedly I loved my father, so you can judge of my despair," he said, sadly.

"It is a terrible blow to you, I know, Louis."

"The only consolation I have is your love, Mariette, and I am about to ask a fresh proof of this love."

"You have but to speak, Louis."

"I want you to marry me at once."

"Can you doubt my consent? Is this the proof of love that you asked?" inquired the young girl.

Then, after a moment's reflection, she added:

"But can we marry before your period of mourning, that only begins to-day, expires?"

"I entreat you, Mariette, not to be deterred by that scruple, decent as it appears."

"I — I will do whatever you wish."

"Listen, Mariette, my heart will be torn with regrets for a long, long time. True mourning is of the soul, and, with me, it will long exceed the period fixed by custom. I know that I honour my father's memory in every fibre of my being, and it is for this very reason that I do not feel it necessary to conform to any purely conventional custom. Believe me, a marriage contracted at so sad a time as this is of a much more solemn and sacred nature than if we married under different circumstances."

"You are right, perhaps, Louis; nevertheless, custom —"

"Because you will be my wife, Mariette, — because you will mourn for my father with me, — because you will share my grief, will he be less deeply regretted? Besides, Mariette, crushed with grief, as I am, I could not live on alone, separated from you, — all I have left in the world now. It would kill me."

"I am only a poor seamstress who knows little or nothing of the laws of society, so I can only tell you how I feel about this matter, Louis. Though a moment ago the idea of marrying you at once seemed almost a breach of propriety, the reasons you give have made me change my mind. Possibly I am wrong; possibly it is the desire to please you that influences me, but now I should not feel the slightest remorse if I married you at once, and yet it seems to me that I am as susceptible as any one I know."

"Yes, and more ungrateful than any one I know," exclaimed Madame Lacombe, tartly, raising herself up in bed.

Then, seeing the surprise depicted on the features of her goddaughter and Louis, she added, in sneering tones:

"Yes, you thought the old woman asleep, and so took advantage of the opportunity to decide all about the wedding, but I heard everything you said, everything —"

"There was nothing said that we were unwilling for you to hear, madame," replied Louis, gravely. "Mariette and I have no desire to retract a single word we have uttered."

"I am certain of that, for you two think only of yourselves. You seem to have no other idea in your head except this detestable marriage. As for me, one might suppose I was already in my coffin. I tell you once for all that —"

"Permit me to interrupt you, madame," said Louis, "and to prove to you that I have not forgotten my promise."

As he spoke, he took a small box which he had deposited upon the table at his entrance, and placed it on Madame Lacombe's bed, saying, as he handed her a key:

"Will you be kind enough to open this box, madame? The contents belong to you."

Madame Lacombe took the key with a suspicious air, opened the box, looked in, and exclaimed, like one both dazzled and stupefied:

"Good God! Good God!"

Recovering from her bewilderment at last, the sick woman emptied the contents of the box out upon the bed; but it seemed as if she could not believe her eyes when she saw the big pile of glittering gold coins before her.

"Oh, what a pile of gold! What a pile of gold!" she exclaimed, ecstatically. "And it is real gold — not a counterfeit piece among it. Great Heavens! What big, handsome coins they are! They must be one hundred

sou pieces at least. What an immense amount of money this must be! Enough to make two poor women like Mariette and me comfortable for life," she added, with a sigh.

"You have about fifteen thousand francs there, madame," replied Louis. "They are yours."

"Mine?" cried the sick woman, "mine?"

Then, shaking her head with an incredulous air, she said, sharply, "Why do you want to mock an old woman? How can this gold belong to me?"

"Because this gold is to purchase you an annuity of twelve hundred francs, so that, after Mariette's marriage, you can live alone or remain with your goddaughter as you prefer, for to-morrow our marriage contract will be signed, and, at the same time, you will receive papers assuring you a yearly income of twelve hundred francs in exchange for this gold. I brought the money here to convince you of the sincerity of my promises. Now, madame, as you overheard our conversation, you know my reasons for entreating Mariette to hasten our marriage. You are comfortably provided for now. If there is any other obstacle to my union with Mariette, tell us, I beseech you, madame. Anything that either she or I can do to satisfy you, we will do. Our happiness will not be complete if you, too, are not content."

The words were uttered in a kind, almost affectionate tone, but Mother Lacombe's only reply was a heavy sigh, as she turned her back upon the speaker.

Louis and Mariette gazed at each other in silent astonishment for a moment; then the girl, kneeling by the invalid's bedside, asked, tenderly:

"What is the matter, godmother?"

Receiving no reply, Mariette leaned over the old woman, and, seeing tears trickling through her wasted fingers, exclaimed:

"Good Heavens, Louis, my godmother is weeping. This is the first time in ten years!"

"What is the matter, madame? Tell us, in Heaven's name."

"I appear like a beggar. I seem to be thinking only of money, and I am ashamed of it," responded the poor creature, sobbing bitterly. "Yes, you think I care only for money; you think I am selling Mariette to you exactly as I would have sold her to that villain, if I had been a bad woman."

"Do not say that, godmother," exclaimed Mariette, embracing the invalid tenderly. "Can you suppose for one moment that Louis and I had any intention of humiliating you by bringing you this money? Louis has done what you asked, that is all."

"I know that, but it was the fear of dying in the street, and of seeing you after marriage far more miserable than you are now, that made me ask for this money. I knew very well that I had no right to any money, but think what it must be to be afraid of being turned into the street when one is old and infirm. I asked for entirely too much, and I did very wrong. What do I really need? Only a mattress in some corner, and a morsel to eat now and then, and, above all, that Mariette will not desert me. I am so used to seeing her around. If she left me I should feel as lonely as if I were in the grave. Besides, there is nobody else in the world who would be so kind and so patient with a cross old sick woman like me. All I ask is to stay with Mariette. To have all this gold thrown in my face, as it were, humiliates me. One may be a mere worm, and yet have a little pride left. When that scoundrel came and offered me gold if I would sell Mariette to him, it made me mad, that is all; but this time it is very different, it makes me weep, — a thing I haven't done before for ten years, as you said yourself, child. This cuts me to the heart."

"Come, come, my dear Madame Lacombe, you need not give yourself the slightest uneasiness with regard to the future," said Louis, deeply touched. "Mariette will

not leave you; we will all live, not luxuriously, but very comfortably together."

"Are you in earnest? Will you let me live with you, really and truly?"

At this fresh proof of the unfortunate woman's unconquerable distrust, Louis and Mariette again exchanged compassionate glances, and taking her godmother's hand, the girl said, tenderly:

"Yes, godmother, yes; we will keep you with us, and care for you as if you were our own mother. You shall see if we do not make you very, very happy."

"It will be no fault of ours if we do not, you may be sure of that," added Louis, earnestly.

The tone and expression of the two young people would have convinced the most skeptical, but it was so hard for this unfortunate woman to believe that such happiness could ever be hers, that, though she tried to conceal her doubts for fear of wounding Mariette and her lover, it was with an involuntary sigh that she replied:

"I believe you, children. Yes, I believe that M. Louis has money, and I believe you both mean well toward me, but after awhile I am afraid you'll find me very much in the way. Newly married people like to be alone, and —"

"What, godmother, you still doubt us, after all we have said?"

"Forgive me, children, I don't mean to," sobbed the poor woman; then, with a heart-broken smile, she added: "Perhaps it is all the better for me that I do doubt, for if, after fifty years of trouble and poverty, I should really come to believe that there was such a thing as happiness for me, I might go mad."

Then, in accents of inexpressible bitterness, she added:

"It wouldn't surprise me if I did. It would be just my luck."

CHAPTER XVI.

A CAPRICIOUS BEAUTY.

FIVE years have elapsed since the events we have just related, and on the evening of the 12th of May, 18— the anniversary of the terrible catastrophe on the Versailles railroad, the following scene was taking place.

It was half-past nine in the evening, and a young woman about twenty-five years of age, a decided brunette, with a perfect figure, and a remarkably spirituelle and high-bred face, was just completing a superb evening toilet with the assistance of two maids, one of whom had just clasped a necklace of diamonds as big as hazelnuts around the neck of her beautiful mistress, while another adjusted a magnificent diadem of the same costly gems upon the lady's beautiful black hair. The low corsage, too, of pale green satin, trimmed with superb lace and bows of pale pink satin ribbon, also glittered with precious stones.

The selection of diamonds as ornaments seemed to have been the result of careful reflection, for on a table close by were several cases containing complete and no less costly garnitures. Two of them, one composed of enormous rubies, the other of magnificent pearls of extraordinary size and lustre, would have excited the admiration of any jeweller.

One of the attendants, who was much older than her companion, seemed — thanks, probably, to her long service — to be on quite familiar terms with her mistress, who, like herself was a Russian, and the other maid, a young Frenchwoman, not understanding the

Russian language, consequently heard without understanding the following conversation between the Comtesse Zomaloff and her trusted maid, Mlle. Katinka:

"Does madame like the way in which I have adjusted her diadem?"

"Very well," replied the countess.

And with a final glance in the glass, she added, as she rose:

"Where is my bouquet?"

"Here, madame."

"What, that horrid withered thing!" cried Madame Zomaloff.

"It is the one M. le duc sent for madame la comtesse."

"I recognise his taste," said Madame Zomaloff, shrugging her shoulders. Then she added, with a mocking air, "It is one he picked up at a bargain, I'll be bound. Some lover who quarrelled with his sweetheart yesterday morning failed to send last evening for the bouquet he had ordered. It takes M. de Riancourt to discover such bargains."

"Ah, madame cannot suppose M. le duc is as stingy as all that. He is so rich."

"All the more reason that he should be."

Some one rapped at the door of the chamber adjoining the dressing-room, and the French maid who went to answer the summons returned in a moment to say:

"M. le Duc de Riancourt has come, and is awaiting madame's pleasure."

"Let him wait," replied Madame Zomaloff. "The princess is in the drawing-room, I suppose."

"Yes, madame la comtesse."

"Very well. Here, Katinka, fasten this bracelet," continued the young woman, holding out her beautiful arm. "What time is it?"

But as Katinka was about to reply, Madame Zomaloff added, with a mocking smile:

"After all, what is the use of asking that question? The duke has just arrived, consequently it must be exactly half after nine."

The clock on the mantel interrupted the countess by striking the half-hour designated, and the lady laughed heartily as she exclaimed:

"What did I tell you, Katinka? M. de Riancourt is as punctual as the clock itself."

"That only proves his ardour and his love."

"I should prefer a less well-regulated emotion, I think. Persons who adore you at a stated time always seem to me to have a watch in place of a heart. Hand me a smelling-bottle,—no, not that one. Yes, this one will do. I am almost sorry that I am dressed, so I cannot keep the poor duke waiting longer to punish him for his tiresome punctuality."

"Why, madame, how unjust you are to him! Why do you marry him if you feel this way toward him?"

"Why do I marry M. de Riancourt?" the countess replied, as she took one more look in the mirror. "You have more curiosity than I have, Katinka. Does any woman ever know why she marries a second time?"

"The reason seems apparent to every one. The duke, though he has no gold mines in the Crimea, and no silver mines in the Ural Mountains—"

"Spare me this tiresome enumeration of my worldly possessions, Katinka."

"Well, madame, though M. le duc cannot boast of such immense possessions as you have, he is one of the wealthiest and most powerful noblemen in France. He is young and good-looking; he has not led a life of dissipation like so many other young men; on the contrary, he is very devout, and—"

"Oh, yes, he is a paragon of virtue, of course. Bring me a heavy wrap; the nights are still cool."

"Has madame any orders to give for the twentieth?"

"Orders?"

"Is it possible that madame forgets her marriage is to take place one week from to-morrow?"

"What! as soon as that?"

"Certainly, madame. You decided on the twentieth of May, and this is the twelfth."

"If I said the twentieth, it will have to be the twentieth. But how strange it is. One is leading a delightful life; one is young and free, and one hates restraint, and yet one cannot give oneself another master too soon."

"A master? A man as kind and gentle as M. le duc? Why, you can make whatever you please of him, madame!"

"I shall never make a charming man of him, and yet I shall marry him. Ah, aunt, aunt, you are responsible for all this. There is one good thing about it, though. One will at least escape the bother of having to ask oneself what one had better do."

The countess proceeded in a leisurely fashion to the drawing-room, where she found her aunt and the Duc de Riancourt awaiting her.

The Princesse Wileska, Madame Zomaloff's aunt, was a tall, distinguished-looking woman, with gray hair which she wore slightly powdered. The Duc de Riancourt was a small man, about thirty years of age, with a thin, rather crooked neck, long, straight hair parted in the middle, a somewhat sanctimonious air, and eyes set rather obliquely, while his slow, precise movements indicated a remarkable amount of self-control.

When Madame Zomaloff entered the room, he advanced to meet her, bowed profoundly, and raised nearly to his lips the pretty hand the countess carelessly offered him, then, straightening himself up, he gazed at her a moment as if dazzled, exclaiming:

"Ah, madame la comtesse, I never saw you arrayed in all your diamonds before! I do not believe there are any other diamonds like them in the world. How

beautiful they are! Good Heavens! how beautiful they are!"

"Really, my dear duke, you quite overpower me by your admiration — for my diamonds; and as my necklace and diadem arouse such tender emotion in your breast and inspire you with such graceful compliments, I will tell you, in strict confidence, the name of my jeweller. It is Ezekiel Rabotautencraff, of Frankfort."

While M. de Riancourt was trying to find some suitable response to Madame Zomaloff's raillery, the aunt of that young lady gave the duke a reproachful look, remarking, with a forced smile:

"See how this mischievous Fedora delights in teasing you. It is a very common way of concealing the affection one feels for people, I believe."

"I humbly admit, my dear princess, that, dazzled by these magnificent jewels, I failed to render due homage to their wearer," said M. de Riancourt, in the hope of repairing his blunder. "But — but may not a person be so dazzled by the sun as to be unable to see even the most beautiful of flowers?"

"I am so impressed by this comparison of yours that I am almost tempted to believe that the same glaring sunshine you speak of must have withered these poor blossoms," retorted the mischievous young woman with a gay laugh, holding up for the duke's inspection the rather faded bouquet he had sent her.

That gentleman blushed up to his very ears; the princess frowned with an impatient air, while the countess, perfectly indifferent to these signs of disapproval, coolly remarked, as she walked toward the door:

"Give your arm to my aunt, M. de Riancourt. I promised my friend, the wife of the Russian ambassador, that I would be at her house very early, as she wishes to present me to one of her relatives, and you know we have first to inspect that wonderful mansion — that enchanted palace everybody is talking about."

After waiting a few seconds in the vestibule, the countess and her aunt saw a clumsy landau, drawn by two emaciated horses, lumber up to the door, and the young widow, turning to the duke in evident surprise, said:

"Why, this is not your carriage! What has become of that dark blue berlin drawn by two handsome gray horses that you placed at our disposal yesterday morning?"

"Under the circumstances I feel no hesitation about confessing a little detail of domestic economy to you, my dear countess," replied the duke, with touching *naïveté*. "To save my grays, for which I was obliged to pay a good round sum, I assure you, I always hire a carriage in the evening. It is very much more economical than to risk one's own turnout at night."

"And you are perfectly right, my dear duke," the princess hastened to say, fearing another shaft of ridicule from her niece. M. de Riancourt's footman was in attendance. He opened the door of the antiquated vehicle. The princess, assisted by the duke, quickly entered it, but as that gentleman offered his hand to the young widow for the same purpose, the petulant beauty paused with the tip of her white satin slipper lightly poised on the carriage step, and said, with an air of the deepest apprehension:

"Do examine every nook and corner of the carriage carefully, aunt, I beseech you, before I get in."

"But why, my dear?" inquired the princess, naïvely. "What is the necessity of this precaution?"

"I am afraid some red-headed girl or some stout shopkeeper may have been left in a corner, as it is in vehicles of this description that worthy shopkeepers drive about all day with their families when they treat themselves to an outing."

Laughing heartily, the young widow sprang into the carriage. As she seated herself, the princess said to her, in a low tone, but with a deeply pained air:

"Really, Fedora, I do not understand you. You are strangely sarcastic toward M. de Riancourt. What can be your object?"

"I want to cure him of his shameful stinginess. How could I better manifest my interest in him?"

Just then the duke took the seat opposite them. He seemed to endure with Christian meekness the ridicule of this young woman who possessed such magnificent diamonds, as well as all sorts of gold and silver mines; but the furtive glance he bestowed on her now and then, and a certain contraction of his thin lips, indicated that a sullen rage was rankling in his heart.

The footman having asked for orders, M. de Riancourt replied:

"To the Hôtel Saint-Ramon."

"Pardon me, M. le duc," answered the footman, "but I don't know where the Hôtel Saint-Ramon is."

"At the end of the Cours la Reine," responded M. de Riancourt.

"Does M. le duc mean that large house on which they have been working several years?"

"Yes."

The footman closed the door, and repeated the instructions to the coachman who applied the whip vigorously to his bony steeds, and the landau started in the direction of the Cours la Reine.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE HOTEL SAINT-RAMON.

M. DE RIANCOURT'S clumsy equipage moved so slowly that when it reached the entrance to the Cours la Reine a pedestrian, who was proceeding in the same direction, kept pace with it without the slightest difficulty.

This pedestrian, who was very poorly dressed, did not seem to be very active, for he leaned heavily on his cane. His long beard, his hair, and his bushy eyebrows were as white as snow, while the swarthy hue of his wrinkled face gave him the appearance of an aged mulatto. When M. de Riancourt's carriage had advanced about half way up the Cours la Reine, its progress was still further impeded by a long line of vehicles, which were evidently also on the way to the Hôtel Saint-Ramon; so the old man passed the landau, and walked on until he came to an avenue glittering with gaily coloured lamps, and filled from end to end with a long procession of carriages.

Though the old man seemed deeply absorbed in thought, his attention was naturally attracted to the large crowd that had assembled near the handsome gateway that served as an entrance to this brilliantly lighted avenue, so he paused, and, addressing one of the bystanders, inquired:

"Can you tell me what all these people are looking at?"

"They are looking at the guests who are going to the opening of the famous Saint-Ramon mansion."

"Saint-Ramon?" murmured the old man, with evident surprise. "How strange!"

Then he added aloud:

"What is this Hôtel Saint-Ramon, monsieur?"

"The eighth wonder of the world, people say. It has taken five years to build it, and the owner gives a house-warming to-night."

"To whom does this house belong, monsieur?"

"To a young man worth several millions."

"And what is his name?"

"Saint-Harem, or Saint-Herem, I believe."

"I thought as much," the old man said to himself. "But, in that case, why do they call it the Saint-Ramon mansion?" Then, turning to the same bystander again, he asked aloud: "Will you be kind enough to tell me what time it is?"

"Half-past ten, exactly."

"Thank you, monsieur," responded the old man, getting a little nearer to the gate. "Half-past ten," he said to himself. "I need not be at Chaillot until midnight, so I have plenty of time to solve this mystery."

After a moment's hesitation, the old man passed through the gateway, and proceeded up a walk shaded with magnificent elms, to a brilliantly lighted half-circle in front of the house itself, which was a veritable palace, — a superb example of the palmiest days of Renaissance architecture.

Crossing the half-circle, the old man found himself at the foot of the imposing perron leading to the peristyle. Through the glass doors that enclosed the entire front of this peristyle, he saw a long row of tall, powdered footmen clad in gorgeous liveries, but all the while the carriages that drew up at the foot of the perron were depositing men, women, and young girls, whose plain attire contrasted strangely with the splendour of this fairy palace.

The old man, to whom allusion has already been made, urged on, apparently, by an almost irresistible curiosity, followed several of these newcomers up under the peristyle, where two tall Swiss, halberds in hand, opened the broad portals of the large glass double door to all, making their halberds ring noisily on the marble floor as each guest entered. Still mingling with a party of invited guests, the old man passed through a double row of footmen in bright blue livery, profusely trimmed with silver, into a large reception-room, where numerous valets, clad in bright blue jackets, black satin knee breeches, and white silk stockings, were in attendance, all manifesting the utmost deference to these guests whose unpretending appearance seemed so out of harmony with the princely luxury of the abode. The guests passed from this room into a large music-room, fitted up for concerts, and from that into an immense circular hall surmounted by a dome. This hall served as a nucleus for three other large apartments, — or rather four in all, including the music-room, — one intended for a ballroom, another for a banquet-hall and the other for a cardroom.

It is impossible to describe the splendour, elegance, and sumptuous furnishings of these large, brilliantly lighted apartments, whose lavish adornments in the shape of paintings, statuary, and flowers were multiplied again and again in the enormous mirrors that lined the walls. The most illustrious artists of the time had assisted in this work of ornamentation. Masterpieces by Ingres and Delacroix hung side by side with those of Scheffer and Paul Delaroche; while the future fame of Couture and Gérôme had evidently been divined by the wealthy and discerning builder of this palace. Among the most magnificent works of art, we must not forget to mention an immense sideboard in the banquet-hall, loaded with superb silver, worthy of the master hand of Benvenuto Cellini, and consisting of candelabra,

pitchers, epergnes, and fruit-dishes, each and every one entitled to an honoured place in a museum, by reason of its rare beauty of form and exquisite ornamentation.

One word more in relation to a peculiar feature of the spacious rotunda. Directly over a gigantic white marble mantel, a monument to the genius of David of Angers, the French Michael Angelo, with allegorical figures in *alto-relievo*, representing the Arts and Sciences at the base, was a portrait that might with reason have been attributed to Velasquez. It represented a pale, austere-looking man with strongly marked features, hollow cheeks, and sunken eyes. A brown robe similar to those worn by monks imparted to this person the impressive character of those portraits of saints or martyrs so frequently encountered in the Spanish school of art, — a resemblance that was heightened by a sort of halo which shone out brightly against the dark background of the picture, and seemed to cast a reflected radiance upon the austere and thoughtful countenance. On the frame below, in German text, were the words:

SAINT-RAMON.

The aged stranger, who had continued to advance with the crowd, at last found himself opposite this fireplace, but, on seeing the portrait, he paused as if overwhelmed with astonishment. His emotion was so great that tears rose to his eyes, and he murmured, almost unconsciously:

"My poor friend, it is indeed he! But why has the word 'saint' been added to his name? Why has this aureole been placed around his head? And this strange entertainment, how is it that a person as poorly clad as I am, and a stranger to the master of the house, besides, should be allowed to enter here unhindered?"

Just then a servant, carrying a large waiter loaded with ices, cake, and similar dainties, paused in front of

the old man, and offered him refreshments. This offer was declined, however, by the stranger, who was striving, though in vain, to determine the social status of those around him. The men, who were for the most part plainly but neatly dressed, some in coats and others in new blouses, while they seemed delighted to participate in the fête, appeared perfectly at ease, or, in other words, perfectly at home, and not in the least astonished at the wonders of this palatial abode; while the women and the young girls, many of whom, by the way, were extremely pretty, were evidently much more deeply impressed by the splendour around them. The young girls, particularly, who were nearly all attired in inexpensive, though perfectly fresh, white dresses, exchanged many admiring comments in low tones.

The venerable stranger, more and more anxious to solve this mystery, at last approached a group composed of several men and women who had paused in front of the fireplace to gaze at the portrait of Saint-Ramon.

"You see that picture, Juliette," he heard a sturdy, pleasant-faced young man say to his wife. "It is only right to call that worthy man Saint-Ramon. There is many a saint in paradise who is not to be compared with him, judging from the good he has done."

"How is that, Michel?"

"Why, thanks to this worthy saint, I, like most of my fellow workmen here, have had lucrative employment for the last five years, and we all owe this good fortune to the original of this portrait, M. Saint-Ramon. Thanks to him, I have not been out of work for a single day, and my wages have not only been liberal enough to support us comfortably, but also to enable us to lay aside a snug little sum for a rainy day."

"But it was not this worthy man whose portrait we see here that ordered and paid for all this work. It was M. de Saint-Herem, who is always so pleasant and

kind, and who said so many nice things to us just now when we came in."

"Of course, my dear Juliette, it was M. de Saint-Herem who employed us, but, as he always said to us when he came to see how we were getting on: 'Ah, boys, if it were not for the wealth I inherited from another person, I could not give you employment or pay you as such industrious and capable workmen ought to be paid, so always hold in grateful remembrance the memory of the person who left me all this money. He accumulated it, penny by penny, by depriving himself of every comfort, while I have the pleasure of spending his wealth. In fact, it is my bounden duty to spend it. What is the good of money, if it is not to be spent? So hold in grateful remembrance, I say, the memory of yonder good old miser. Bless his avarice, for it gives me the pleasure of accomplishing wonderful things, and you, liberal wages, richly earned.'"

"Still, while we are, of course, under great obligations to this worthy miser, we ought to be equally grateful to M. de Saint-Herem, it seems to me. So many wealthy people spend little or nothing; or, if they do employ us, haggle about the price of our work, or keep us waiting a long time for our money."

The venerable stranger listened to this conversation with quite as much interest as astonishment. He also lent an attentive ear to other conversations that were going on around him, and everywhere he heard a chorus of praises and benedictions lavished upon Saint-Ramon, while M. de Saint-Herem's nobility of soul and liberality were lauded to the skies.

"Is all this a dream?" the old man said to himself. "Who would ever believe that these eulogiums and protestations of respect were addressed to the memory of a miser, — of a person belonging to a class of people that is almost universally despised and vilified? And it is the spendthrift heir of this miser who thus eulogises

him! But what strange whim led him to invite all his workmen to his entertainment?"

The astonishment of the old man increased as he began to note a strange contrast that was becoming apparent between the guests, for quite a number of correctly dressed and extremely distinguished-looking men — many with decorations in their buttonholes — were now moving about the spacious rooms with exquisitely dressed ladies on their arms.

Florestan de Saint-Herem, handsomer, gayer, and more brilliant than ever, seemed to be entirely in his element in this atmosphere of luxury and splendour. He did the honours of his palace delightfully, receiving every guest with wonderful grace and perfect courtesy. He had stationed himself near the door of the large circular hall into which the reception-room opened, and no woman or young girl entered to whom he did not address a few of those cordial and affable words which, when they are sincere, never fail to charm even the most timid, and make them perfectly at ease.

Florestan was thus engaged when he saw the Comtesse Zomaloff, accompanied by the Princesse Wileska and the Duc de Riancourt, enter the hall.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A NOVEL ENTERTAINMENT.

SAINT-HEREM had never seen the Comtesse Zomaloff and her aunt before, but he had known M. de Riancourt a long time, so on seeing him enter, accompanied by two ladies, Florestan stepped quickly forward to meet him.

"My dear Saint-Herem," said the duke, "permit me to introduce to you Madame la Princesse Wileska and Madame la Comtesse Zomaloff. These ladies hope they have not been indiscreet in accompanying me here this evening to see your new house and its wonders."

"I am delighted to have the honour of receiving the ladies, and shall be only too glad to show them what you are pleased to call the wonders of my house."

"And M. de Riancourt is right, for, on entering here, I must confess that it is difficult to decide what one should admire most, everything is so beautiful," remarked the countess.

"I also feel it my duty to tell you, my dear Saint-Herem, that Madame Zomaloff's visit is not altogether one of curiosity," remarked the duke, "for I have told the countess of your intentions in regard to the house, and as I shall be so fortunate as to have the honour of bestowing my name on the countess a week from now, you understand, of course, that I can come to no decision in this matter without consulting her."

"Really, madame, as M. de Riancourt thus gives himself all the airs of a married man in advance, don't you think it only fair that he should submit to the conse-

quences of his revelation?" exclaimed Florestan, gaily, turning to Madame Zomaloff. "So, as a husband never gives his arm to his wife, will you not do me the honour to accept mine?"

In this way Florestan escaped the necessity of offering his arm to the princess, who seemed likely to prove a much less agreeable companion than her young and pretty niece, who graciously accepted her host's proffered arm, while M. de Riancourt, as in duty bound, offered his arm to the princess.

"I have travelled a great deal, monsieur," said Madame Zomaloff, "but I have never seen anything to compare, not with the magnificence, for any millionaire could compass that, — but with the exquisite taste which has presided over every detail in the construction of this mansion. It is really a superb museum. You will pardon me, I trust, but I really cannot refrain from expressing the admiration the superb decoration of this ceiling excites."

"The artist's reward should follow admiration for his work, do you not think so, madame?" inquired Florestan, smiling. "So it depends upon you to make the artist who painted that ceiling both proud and happy."

And as he spoke Saint-Herem pointed out to Madame Zomaloff one of the most illustrious masters of the modern school of art.

"I thank you a thousand times, monsieur, for this piece of good fortune!" exclaimed the young woman, advancing with Florestan toward the artist.

"My friend," Saint-Herem said to him, "Madame la Comtesse Zomaloff wishes to express to you her intense admiration for your work."

"Not only my admiration, but my gratitude as well," added the lady, graciously. "The profound pleasure the sight of such a *chef-d'œuvre* excites certainly places the beholder under a deep obligation to the creator of it."

"However pleasing and flattering such praise may be

to me, I can take only a part of it to myself," replied the illustrious painter, with great modesty and good taste. "But leaving my own works out of the question entirely, so I may be able to express myself more freely, let me advise you to notice particularly the decorations of the ceiling of the music-room. They are the work of M. Ingres, our Raphael, and will furnish pilgrims of art in days to come with as many objects of adoration as the finest frescoes of Rome, Pisa, or Florence, yet this *chef-d'œuvre* would not be in existence but for my friend Saint-Herem. Really, madame, in this extravagant but essentially materialistic age, is it not a delightful phenomenon to meet a Medici, as in the palmy days of the Italian republics?"

"That is true, monsieur," replied the countess, quickly, "and history has been only just in—"

"Pardon me for interrupting you, madame la comtesse," said Saint-Herem, smiling, "but I am no less modest than my famous friend here, so for fear that your enthusiasm may lead you astray, I must point out the real Medici to you. There he is," added Florestan, pointing to the portrait of Saint-Ramon, as he spoke.

"What an austere face!" exclaimed the countess, scrutinising the portrait with mingled surprise and curiosity; then seeing the name inscribed upon the frame, she asked, turning to Florestan in evident astonishment, "Saint-Ramon? What saint is that?"

"A saint of my own making, madame. He was my uncle, and, though I am not a pope, I have ventured to canonise this admirable man as a reward for his long martyrdom and for the miracles he has wrought since his death."

"His long martyrdom! The miracles he wrought after his death!" Madame Zomaloff repeated, wonderingly. "You are jesting, monsieur, are you not?"

"Far from it, madame. My uncle imposed the severest privations upon himself during his life, for he

was a confirmed miser. That was his martyrdom. I inherited his wealth; so the artistic achievements you so much admire really owe their origin indirectly to him. These are the miracles to which I alluded."

Madame Zomaloff, more and more impressed by Saint-Herem's originality, was silent for a moment, but M. de Riancourt, who had been standing a little distance off, now approached Florestan, and said:

"There is a question I have been wanting to ask you ever since our arrival, my dear Saint-Herem. Who are these people? I have recognised three or four great painters and a celebrated architect among them, but who are the others? The princess and I have been trying in vain to solve the mystery."

"As M. Riancourt has ventured to ask this rather indiscreet question, I must confess that I share his curiosity, monsieur," added Madame Zomaloff.

"You have doubtless noticed, madame, that most of the persons I have taken such pleasure in welcoming this evening do not belong to the fashionable world."

"That is true."

"Still, you were much pleased just now, were you not, madame, to meet the great artist whose work you so greatly admired?"

"Yes, monsieur; I told you how much pleasure the opportunity to meet him afforded me."

"You must consequently approve, I think, of my having extended an invitation to him as well as to a number of his colleagues."

"It seems to me that such an invitation was almost obligatory upon you, monsieur."

"Ah, well, madame, I feel that it was likewise obligatory upon me to extend the same invitation to all who had assisted in any way in the construction of this house, from the famous artists to the humblest mechanic, so they are all here with their families enjoying the beau-

ties they have created, as they, in my opinion, at least, have an undoubted right to do."

"What!" exclaimed M. de Riancourt, "do you mean to say that you have the carvers, and gilders, and locksmiths, and carpenters, and paper-hangers, and even the masons, here? Why, this passes my comprehension."

"Do you know anything about the habits of bees, my dear duke?"

"Not much, I must admit."

"You might consider their habits exceedingly reprehensible, my dear duke, inasmuch as the insolent creatures insist upon occupying the cells they themselves have constructed; and, what is worse, they even assert their claim to the delicious honey they have accumulated with so much skill and labour for their winter's need."

"And what conclusion do you draw from all this?"

"That we drones should give the poor and industrious human bees the innocent satisfaction of enjoying, at least for a day, the gilded cells they have constructed for us, — for us who subsist upon the honey gathered by others."

Madame Zomaloff had dropped Florestan's arm a few moments before. She now took it again, and walking on a few steps, so as to leave her aunt and the duke a little way behind her, she said to Saint-Herem, with deep earnestness:

"Your idea is charming, monsieur, and I do not wonder at the expression of contentment I notice on the faces of your guests. Yes, the more I think of it, the more just and generous the idea seems to me. After all, as you say, this superb mansion represents the combined labour of artisans of every degree, high and low; hence, in your eyes, this house must be much more than a marvel of good taste and luxury, as the associations connected with its construction will always be unspeakably precious to you. That being the case —"

"Go on, madame."

"I cannot understand how —"

"You hesitate, madame. Speak, I beg of you."

"M. de Riancourt has informed you of our intended marriage, monsieur," said Madame Zomaloff, with some embarrassment, after a moment's silence. "A couple of days ago, while talking with him about the difficulty of securing as large and handsomely appointed house as I desired, M. de Riancourt happened to remember that some one had told him that you might be willing to dispose of the house you had just completed."

"Yes, madame, M. de Riancourt wrote, asking to be allowed to go through the house, and I advised him to wait until this evening, as I intended to give an entertainment, and he would consequently be much better able to judge of the arrangement and appearance of the reception-rooms, but I did not expect to have the honour of receiving you, madame."

"I have ventured to ask you several questions already, monsieur," remarked the young woman, with marked hesitation, "and I am going to hazard one more. How, monsieur, can you have the courage or the ingratitude to think of abandoning this home which you have created with so much interest and love, this home with which so many kind and generous memories are already associated?"

"Good Heavens! madame," replied Saint-Herem, with the most cheerful air imaginable, "I am going to sell the house because I am ruined, utterly ruined! This is my last day as a man of wealth, and you must admit, madame, that, thanks to your presence here, the day could not have a happier or more brilliant ending."

CHAPTER XIX.

A CHANGE OF OWNERS.

FLORESTAN DE SAINT-HEREM had uttered the words, "I am ruined, utterly ruined," with such unruffled good-humour and cheerfulness that Madame Zomaloff stared at him in amazement, unable to believe her ears; so after a moment, she exclaimed:

"What, monsieur, you are —"

"Ruined, madame, utterly ruined. Five years ago my sainted uncle left me a fortune of nearly or quite five millions. I have spent that and nearly eighteen hundred thousand francs more, but the sale of this house and its contents will pay what I owe and leave me about one hundred thousand francs, upon which I can live in comfort in some quiet retreat. I shall turn shepherd, perhaps. That existence would be such a charming contrast to my past life, when impossibilities and marvellous dreams were changed into realities for me and my friends by the vast wealth of which I had so unexpectedly become the possessor, and when all that was beautiful, elegant, sumptuous, and rare was blended in my dazzling career. Would you believe it, madame, I was famed for my liberality through all Europe? Europe? Why! did not a Chandernagor lapidary send me a sabre, the handle of which was encrusted with precious stones, with the following note: 'This scimitar belonged to Tippoo-Sahib; it ought now to belong to M. de Saint-Herem. The price is twenty-five thousand francs, payable at the house of the Rothschilds in Paris.'

Yes, madame, the rarest and most costly objects of art were sent to me from every part of the world. The finest English horses were in my stables; the most costly wines filled my cellar; the finest cooks quarrelled for the honour of serving me, and the famous Doctor Gasterini — you know him, madame, do you not?"

"Who has not heard of the greatest gourmand in the known world?"

"Ah, well, madame, that famous man declared he dined quite as well at my table as at his own — and he did not speak in equally flattering terms of M. de Talleyrand's cuisine, I assure you. Believe me, madame, I have the consoling consciousness of having spent my fortune generously, nobly, and discriminately. I have no cause to reproach myself for a single foolish outlay or unworthy act. It is with a mind filled with delightful memories and a heart full of serenity that I see my wealth take flight."

Saint-Herem's tone was so earnest, the sincerity of his sentiments and his words were so legibly imprinted upon his frank and handsome face, that Madame Zomaloff, convinced of the truth of what he said, replied:

"Really, monsieur, such a philosophical way of viewing the subject amazes me. To think of renouncing a life like that you have been leading without one word of bitterness!"

"Bitterness! when I have known so many joys. That would be ungrateful, indeed!"

"And you can leave this enchanted palace without one sigh of regret, and that, too, just as you were about to enjoy it?"

"I did not know that the hour of my ruin was so close at hand until my rascally steward showed me the state of my bank account hardly a week ago, so you see I have lost no time. Besides, in leaving this palace which I have taken so much pleasure in creating, I am like a poet who has written the last verse of his poem,

like the artist who has just given the last touch to his picture, after which they have the imperishable glory of having achieved a masterpiece to console them. In my case, madame, — excuse my artistic vanity, — this temple of luxury, art, and pleasure will be a noble monument; so how ungrateful I should be to complain of my lot! And you, madame, will reign here as the divinity of this temple, for you will purchase the house, I am sure. It would suit you so well. Do not let the opportunity to secure it pass. M. de Riancourt may or may not have told you, but he knows that Lord Wilmot has made me a handsome offer for it. I should be so sorry to be obliged to sell to him, for he is so ugly, and so is his wife and his five daughters as well. Think what presiding spirits they would be for this splendid temple, which seems somehow to have been built expressly for you. I have one favour to ask, though, madame. That large painting of my uncle is a fine work of art, and though the name and face of Saint-Ramon appear several times in the medallions that adorn the façade, it would be a pleasure to me to think that this worthy uncle of mine would gaze down for ages to come upon the pleasures which he denied himself all his life!"

The conversation between the countess and Saint-Herem was here interrupted by M. de Riancourt. The party had been making a tour of the reception apartments as they talked, and the duke now said to Florestan:

"The house is superb, and everything is in perfect taste, but eighteen hundred thousand francs is entirely too much to ask for it, even including furniture and silver."

"I have no personal interest in the matter, I assure you, my dear duke," replied Florestan, smiling. "The eighteen hundred thousand francs will all go to my creditors, so I must needs be unpleasantly tenacious in

regard to price; besides, Lord Wilmot offers me that amount, and is urging me to accept it."

"But you will certainly make concessions to me that you would not make to Lord Wilmot, my dear fellow. Come, Saint-Herem, don't be obdurate. Make a reasonable reduction — "

"M. de Saint-Herem," hastily interposed the countess, "the duke must permit me to interfere with his negotiations, for I will take the house at the price you have mentioned. I give you my word, and I ask yours in return."

"Thank Heaven, madame, my star has not deserted me," said Florestan, cordially offering his hand to Madame Zomaloff. "The matter is settled."

"But, madame!" exclaimed M. de Riancourt, greatly surprised and not a little annoyed at this display of impulsiveness on the part of his future wife, — for he had hoped to secure a reduction in price from Saint-Herem, — "really, this is a very important matter, and you ought not to commit yourself in this way without consulting me."

"You have my word, M. de Saint-Herem," said Madame Zomaloff, again interrupting the duke. "This purchase of mine is a purely personal matter. If convenient to you, my agent will confer with yours to-morrow."

"Very well, madame," replied Saint-Herem. Then, turning to M. de Riancourt, he added, gaily, "You are not offended, I hope, monsieur. It is all your own fault, though. You should have played the grand seigneur, not haggled like a shopkeeper."

Just at that moment the orchestra, which had not been playing for nearly a quarter of an hour, gave the signal for the dancing to begin.

"Pardon me for leaving you, countess," remarked Saint-Herem, again turning to Madame Zomaloff, "but I have invited a young girl to dance this set with me, —

a very pretty girl, the daughter of one of the head carpenters who built my house, or, rather, your house, madame. It is pleasant to take this thought, at least, away with me on leaving you."

And bowing respectfully to Madame Zomaloff, their host went in search of the charming young girl he had engaged as a partner, and the ball began.

"My dear Fedora," said the princess, who had watched her niece's long conversation with Saint-Herem with no little annoyance, "it is getting late, and we promised our friend that we would be at her house early."

"You must permit me to say that I think you have acted much too hastily in this matter," said the duke to his fiancée. "Saint-Herem has got to sell this house to pay his debts, and, with a little perseverance, we could have induced him to take at least fifty thousand francs less, particularly if *you* had insisted upon it. It is always so hard to refuse a pretty woman anything," added M. de Riancourt, with his most insinuating smile.

"What are you thinking of, my dear Fedora?" asked the princess, touching the young woman lightly on the arm, for her niece, who was standing with one elbow resting on a gilded console loaded with flowers, seemed to have relapsed into a profound reverie, and evidently had not heard a single word that her aunt and the duke had said to her. "Why don't you answer? What is the matter with you?"

"I hardly know. I feel very strangely," replied the countess, dreamily.

"You need air, probably, my dear countess," said M. de Riancourt. "I am not at all surprised. Though the apartments are very large, this plebeian crowd renders the atmosphere suffocating, and —"

"Are you ill, Fedora?" asked the princess, with increasing uneasiness.

"Not in the least. On the contrary, the emotion I

experience is full of sweetness and charm, so, my dear aunt, I scarcely know how to express —"

"Possibly it is the powerful odour of these flowers that affects you so peculiarly," suggested M. de Riancourt.

"No, it is not that. I hesitate to tell you and my aunt; you will think it so strange and absurd."

"Explain, Fedora, I beg of you."

"I will, but you will be greatly surprised," responded the young widow with a half-confidential, half-coquettish air. Then, turning to M. de Riancourt, she said, in an undertone:

"It seems to me —"

"Well, my dear countess?"

"That —"

"Go on. I beg of you."

"That I am dying to marry M. de Saint-Herem."

"Madame!" exclaimed the astonished duke, turning crimson with anger. "Madame!"

"What is the matter, my dear duke?" asked the princess quickly.

"Madame la comtesse," said the duke, forcing a smile, "your jest is — is rather unseemly, to say the least, and —"

"Give me your arm, my dear duke," said Madame Zomaloff, with the most natural air imaginable, "for it is late. We ought to have been at the embassy some time ago. It is all your fault, too. How is it that you, who are punctuality personified, did not strike the hour of eleven long ago."

"Ah, madame, I am in no mood for laughing," exclaimed the duke, in his most sentimental tones. "How your cruel jest pained me just now! It almost broke my heart."

"I had no idea your heart was so vulnerable, my poor friend."

"Ah, madame, you are very unjust, when I would gladly give my life for you."

"Would you, really? Ah, well, I shall ask no such heroic sacrifice as that on your part, my dear duke."

A few minutes afterward, Madame Zomaloff, her aunt, and the duke left the Hôtel Saint-Ramon.

Almost at the same instant the stranger who looked so much like an aged mulatto left the palatial dwelling, bewildered by what he had just seen and heard. The clock in a neighbouring church was striking the hour as he descended the steps.

"Half-past eleven!" the old man murmured. "I have plenty of time to reach Chaillot before midnight. Ah, what other strange things am I about to hear?"

CHAPTER XX.

THE RETURN.

THE old man climbed the hill leading to the Rue de Chaillot, and soon reached the church of that poor and densely populated faubourg.

Contrary to custom at that hour, the church was lighted. Through the open door the brilliantly illuminated nave and altar could be plainly seen. Though the edifice was still empty, some solemn ceremony was evidently about to take place, for though midnight was close at hand, there were lights in many of the neighbouring houses, and several groups had assembled on the pavement in front of the church. Approaching one of these groups, the old man listened attentively, and heard the following conversation:

"They will be here soon, now."

"Yes, for it is almost midnight."

"It is a strange hour to be married, isn't it?"

"Yes, but when one gets a dowry, one needn't be too particular about the hour."

"Who is to be married at this hour, gentlemen?" inquired the old man.

"It is very evident that you don't live in this neighbourhood, my friend."

"No. I am a stranger here."

"If you were not, you would know that it was the night for those six marriages that have taken place here on the night of the twelfth of May, for the last four years. On the night of the twelfth of May, every year,

six poor young girls are married in this church, and each girl receives a dowry of ten thousand francs."

"From whom?"

"From a worthy man who died five years ago. He left a handsome fund for this purpose, and his name is consequently wonderfully popular in Chaillot."

"And what is the name of the worthy man who dowered these young girls so generously?" inquired the stranger, with a slight tremor in his voice.

"They call him Father Richard, monsieur. He has a son, a very fine young man, who carries out his father's last wishes religiously. And a nobler man than M. Louis never lived. Everybody knows that he and his wife and child live on three or four thousand francs a year, and yet they must have inherited a big fortune from Father Richard, to be able to give six young girls a dowry of ten thousand francs apiece every year, to say nothing of the expenses of the school and of Father Richard's Home."

"Pardon a stranger's curiosity, monsieur, but you speak of a school."

"Yes, Father Richard's School. Madame Mariette has charge of it."

"Madame Mariette, who is she?"

"M. Louis Richard's wife. The school was founded for twenty-five little boys and as many little girls, who remain there until they are twelve years old, and are then apprenticed to carefully chosen persons. The children are well clothed and fed, and each child receives ten sous a day besides, to encourage them to save their money."

"And you say it is M. Louis Richard's wife who has charge of this school?"

"Yes, monsieur, and she says she takes so much interest in it because before her marriage she was a poor working girl who could neither read nor write, and that she herself suffered so cruelly from a lack of educa-

tion, that she is glad to be able to prevent others from suffering what she suffered."

"But the home — You also spoke of a home, I believe."

"That was founded for working women who are ill, or no longer able to work. Madame Lacombe has charge of that."

"And who is Madame Lacombe?"

"Madame Mariette's godmother, a good woman who has lost one arm. She is kindness and patience personified to the poor women under her charge, and it is not at all to be wondered at, for she too knows what it is to be poor and infirm; for, as she tells everybody, before her goddaughter married M. Louis they often went hungry for days at a time. But here comes the bridal party. Step in here beside me so you can see them better."

Louis Richard, with Madame Lacombe on his arm, walked at the head of the little procession; then came Mariette, holding a handsome little four-year-old boy by the hand.

No one would have recognised Madame Lacombe. Her once pallid and wrinkled face was plump and rosy, and characterised by an expression of perfect content. She wore a lace bonnet, and a handsome shawl partially concealed her silk gown.

Louis Richard's countenance wore a look of quiet happiness. It was evident that he realised the great responsibility that devolved upon him. Mariette, who was prettier than ever, had that air of gentle dignity that suits young mothers so well. In spite of her marriage, she still clung to the simple garb of her girlhood. Faithful to the coquettish little cap of the grisette, she had never worn a bonnet, and she was quite irresistible in her freshness, grace, and beauty, under her snowy cap with its bows of sky-blue ribbon.

After Louis, his wife and child, and Mother Lacombe, came, dressed in white and crowned with orange blossoms,

the six young girls who were to receive dowries that year, attended by the parents or the witnesses of their betrothed husbands, then the six bridegrooms escorting the relatives or witnesses of their affianced wives, all evidently belonging to the labouring class. Following them came the twenty-four couples that had been married during the four preceding years, then the children of Father Richard's School, and, finally, such inmates of the home as were able to attend the ceremony.

It took nearly a quarter of an hour for the procession to pass into the church, and the aged stranger watched it sadly and thoughtfully while such comments as the following were exchanged around him:

"It is all due to Father Richard that these good, industrious girls can become happy wives."

"Yes, and how happy the married couples look!"

"And they owe it all to Father Richard, too."

"And to M. Louis, who carries out his father's wishes so faithfully."

"Yes; but if it were not for the large fortune Father Richard left him, M. Louis would not have been able to do any of these things."

"And the schoolchildren. Did you notice how plump and rosy and contented they looked, — the boys in their comfortable woollen jackets, and the girls in their warm merino dresses."

"Think of it, there were nearly one hundred and fifty persons in the procession, and every one of them has shared Father Richard's benefits!"

"That is true; and when one remembers that this work has been going on for four years, it makes between six and seven hundred people who have been taught or supported or married through Father Richard's bounty."

"To say nothing of the fact that, if M. Louis lives thirty years longer, there will be five or six thousand persons who will owe their happy, respectable lives

to Father Richard — for poverty causes the ruin of so many poor creatures!"

"Five or six thousand persons, you say; why, there will be many more than that."

"How do you make that out?"

"Why, there will be children in each of these households. These children will share the advantages that have been bestowed upon their parents. They will consequently be well brought up and receive a fair education. Later in life they will receive their share of the small fortune their thrifty and industrious parents are almost certain to accumulate, for it is an easy matter to save when one has something to start with."

"True; and calculating in this way, the number of persons benefited is increased at least three-fold; while if one thinks of the second and third generations, the good this worthy man has accomplished becomes incalculable."

"And yet it is so easy to do good, and there are so many persons who have more money than they know what to do with. But what is the matter with you, my friend?" exclaimed the speaker. "What the devil are you crying about?" he added, seeing that the stranger beside him was sobbing violently.

"What I have heard you say about Father Richard, and the sight of all these happy people, touches me so deeply —"

"Oh, if that is the cause of your tears, they do you honour, my friend. But as all this seems to interest you so much, let us go into the church and witness the ceremony. You can go to the home, too, afterward, if you choose; it is open to everybody to-night."

The crowd in the church was so great that the old man was unable to secure a place that commanded a view of the altar, but after a moment's reflection he seemed to become perfectly reconciled to the fact, and stationed himself by the holy-water font near the door.

The ceremonies ended, a solemn silence pervaded the edifice, finally broken by the grave voice of the officiating priest, who addressed the newly wedded couples as follows:

"And now that your unions have been consecrated by God, my young friends, persevere in the honest, industrious, and God-fearing life that has secured you this good fortune, and never forget that you owe this just reward of courage in adversity and of dignity in poverty to a man imbued with the tenderest affection for his brother man; for, faithful to the spirit of a true Christian, he did not consider himself the master, but simply as the custodian and almoner of the wealth with which Heaven had blessed him. Does not Christ tell his followers to love one another, and bid those who are endowed with this world's goods to give to those who have none? The Saviour rewarded this good man by giving him a son worthy of him, and his obedience to the laws of Christian fraternity makes him deserve to have his name ever cherished and honoured among men. You, in your just gratitude for benefits conferred, owe him this remembrance, and Father Richard's name should be for ever blessed by you, your children, and your children's children."

An approving murmur from the crowd greeted these words, and drowned the sobs of the aged stranger, who had dropped upon his knees, apparently completely overcome with emotion.

The noise the newly married couples made in leaving the altar aroused the old man, who hastily rose just in time to see Louis Richard advancing toward him with Madame Lacombe on his arm. The old man trembled in every limb, but as Louis was about to pass he hastily caught up a dipper of holy water and offered it to Mariette's husband.

"Thank you, my good father," said Louis, kindly. Then noting the shabby clothing and white hair of the

donor, and seeing a request for alms in the act, the young man slipped a shining gold piece in the extended hand, saying, almost affectionately:

"Keep it and pray for Father Richard."

The old man seized the coin greedily, and, raising it to his lips, kissed it again and again, while the tears streamed down his wrinkled cheeks.

Louis Richard did not notice this strange incident, however, for he had left the church, and, followed by the bridal party and a large number of the spectators, was on his way to the home, whither the aged stranger, leaning heavily on his cane, also followed him.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE AWAKENING.

THE home stood upon a high knoll in a location as pleasant as it was salubrious, and large shady grounds surrounded the spacious building.

The night was clear and still; spring perfumes filled the air, and when the old man reached the spot he found the people ranged in a half-circle around the steps of the building, no room inside being large enough to hold the crowd.

Soon Louis Richard, according to his custom each year, came out upon the perron, and said:

"My friends, five years ago to-night I lost the best and kindest of fathers. He died a frightful death in that terrible catastrophe on the Versailles railway. My father, being the possessor of a handsome fortune, might have lived in luxury and idleness. On the contrary, he preferred to lead a frugal and industrious life, so while he denied himself all comforts, and earned his bread by his daily toil, his wealth slowly but surely increased day by day; but when the day of his premature death came, I had to mourn one of the warmest friends of humanity, for nearly all his wealth was devoted to the accomplishment of three great and noble works: the amelioration of the condition, —

"First, Of poor children deprived of the advantages of an elementary education.

"Secondly, Of poor but honest and industrious young

girls who are too often exposed to terrible temptation by reason of ill health, inadequate wages, and poverty.

"And lastly, Of aged or infirm women who, after a long life of toil, are incapacitated for further labour.

"True, the result accomplished each year is painfully small when one thinks of the ills of humanity, but he who does all the good he can, even if he only shares his crust with his starving brother, does his duty as nobly as the person who gives millions.

"It is the duty of every right-minded man to make every possible effort to improve the condition of his fellow men; but in this work I am acting only as my father's agent, and the accomplishment of this glorious duty would fill my life with unbounded happiness if I were not obliged to mourn the loss of the most beloved of parents."

Louis Richard had scarcely uttered these last words when quite a commotion became apparent in the crowd, for the aged stranger's strength seemed suddenly to fail him, and he would have fallen to the ground had it not been for the friendly support of those near him.

On hearing the cause of the hubbub, Louis Richard hastened to the old man's aid, and had him taken into the home in order that he might receive immediate attention, after which he requested the bridal parties to adjourn to the immense tent, where supper was to be served, and where Madame Lacombe and Mariette would do the honours in his absence.

The old man had been carried in an unconscious condition to Louis's office, a room on the ground floor. His profound respect for his father's memory had prevented him from parting with the furniture of the room he and his father had shared so long. The writing-desk, the old bureau, the antique chest, as well as the cheap painted bedstead, all had been kept, and it was on this same bed the unconscious man was laid.

As soon as he entered the room Louis despatched the

servant to a neighbouring drug store for some spirits, so he was left alone with the patient, whose features were almost entirely concealed by his long white hair and beard.

Louis took the old man's hand to feel his pulse, but as he did so the patient made a slight movement and uttered a few incoherent words.

The voice sounded strangely familiar to Louis, and he endeavoured to get a better look at the stranger's features, but the dim light that pervaded the room and the patient's long hair and beard rendered the attempt futile.

A moment more and Louis Richard's guest languidly raised his head and gazed around him. His eyes having fallen on the rather peculiarly shaped gray bedstead, he made a movement of surprise, but when he saw the old-fashioned chest, he exclaimed, excitedly:

"Where am I? My God, is this a dream?"

Again the voice struck Louis as being so familiar that he, too, gave a slight start, but almost immediately shaking his head and smiling bitterly, he muttered under his breath:

"Alas! regret often gives rise to strange illusions." Then addressing the old man in affectionate tones, he asked:

"How do you feel now, my good father?"

On hearing these words, the old man, seizing Louis's hand, covered it with tears and kisses before the latter could prevent it.

"Come, come, my good father," said Mariette's husband, surprised and touched, "I have done nothing to deserve such gratitude on your part. I may be more fortunate some day, however. But tell me how you feel now. Was it weakness or overfatigue that caused your fainting fit?"

The old man made no reply, but pressed Louis's hand convulsively to his panting breast. The younger man,

conscious of a strange and increasing emotion, felt the tears spring to his eyes.

"Listen to me, my good father," he began.

"Oh, say that once more — just once more," murmured the old man, hoarsely.

"Ah, well, my good father — "

But Louis did not finish the sentence, for his guest, unable to restrain himself any longer, raised himself up in bed, at the same time exclaiming, in a voice vibrating with tenderness:

"Louis!"

That name, uttered with all the passion of a despairing soul, was a revelation.

The younger man turned as pale as death, started back, and stood as if petrified, with fixed, staring eyes.

The shock was too great, and several seconds elapsed before the thought, "My father is not dead," could penetrate his brain.

Does not the sudden transition from intense darkness into bright sunlight blind us for a time?

But when the blissful truth dawned upon Louis's mind, he threw himself on his knees by the old man's bedside, and, putting back his long white locks with a feverish hand, studied his father's features with eager, radiant eyes, until, convinced beyond a doubt, he could only murmur in a sort of ecstasy: "My father, oh, God, my father!"

The scene that ensued between father and son beggars description; but when the first transports of happiness had given place to a momentary calm, Father Richard said to his son:

"I will tell you my story in a few words, my dear Louis. I have been asleep for five years, and woke only forty-eight hours ago."

"What do you mean?"

"I was with poor Ramon and his daughter in one

of the worst wrecked carriages. In some providential way my life was saved, though my right leg was broken, and fright deprived me of reason."

"You, father?"

"Yes, I became insane with terror. I lost my reason completely. Removed from the scene of the catastrophe, my fractured limb was set in the home of a worthy physician, and after I recovered from that injury I was taken to an insane asylum near Versailles. My lunacy was of a harmless type. I talked only of my lost wealth. For nearly four years there was no change in my condition, but at the end of that time a slight improvement became apparent. This continued until my recovery became complete, though I was not allowed to leave the hospital until two days ago. It would be impossible to describe my feelings on my entire restoration to reason, when I woke as I told you from my long five years' sleep. My first thought, I blush to confess, was one of avarice. What had become of my property? What use had you made of it? When I was released from the hospital yesterday, the first thing I did was to hasten to my notary, your former employer, and my friend. You can imagine his astonishment. He told me that at first it was your intention to leave the property untouched, that is, except for a small stipend for your maintenance and that of your wife, until you attained the age of thirty-six; but after a serious illness, thinking that death might overtake you before you had accomplished what you considered a sacred duty, you changed your mind, and came to consult him in regard to certain plans, to which he gave his unqualified approval. 'What were these plans?' I asked. 'Have the courage to wait until to-morrow night,' he replied; 'then go to the church of Chaillot, and you will know all, and thank God for having given you such a son.' I did wait, my dear Louis. My long beard and my white hair changed me a great deal, but I stained my skin

to disguise myself more completely, and to enable me to approach you without any danger of recognition. Oh, if you knew all I have seen and heard, my dear, noble child! My name revered and blessed, thanks to your nobility of soul and the subterfuge prompted by your filial love! Ah, what a revulsion of feeling this wrought in me. But, alas! the illusion was of short duration. I had no hand whatever in the noble deeds attributed to me."

"How can you say that, father? But for your self-denial and perseverance, how could I ever have done any good? Did you not leave me the means of accomplishing it, an all-powerful lever? My only merit consisted in having made a good use of the immense power bequeathed to me by you at the cost of so many privations on your part, and in realising the duties wealth imposed upon me. The terrible poverty and the lack of education from which my beloved wife had suffered so much, and the perils to which this poverty and lack of education had exposed her, her godmother's cruel suffering, — all had served to enlighten me as to the needs of the poor, and all three of us longed to do everything in our power to save others from the ills we had suffered. But after all, it is your work, not mine. I have reaped; it was you who sowed."

The door suddenly opened, and Florestan Saint-Herem rushed in, and threw himself into his friend's arms with so much impetuosity that he did not even see Father Richard.

"Embrace me, Louis, rejoice with me!" he exclaimed. "You are my best friend, and you shall be the first to hear the news. I knew I should find you here, so I did not lose a minute in coming to tell you that Saint-Ramon has proved a saint indeed, for he has just worked the most wonderful of miracles."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, two hours ago I was utterly ruined, but now

I am far richer than I ever have been. Think of it, Louis, gold mines and silver mines, and diamonds by the bushel, — fabulous wealth, in short, wealth amounting to dozens of millions. Oh, Saint-Ramon, Saint-Ramon, blessed be thy name for ever! I was right to canonise thee, for thou hast not proved ungrateful. thank Heaven!"

"For pity's sake, explain, Florestan."

"An hour ago, just as the entertainment I was giving to those honest workmen was drawing to a close, one of my servants came to inform me that a lady wished to see me in private. Who should it be but the Countess Zomaloff, a young and charming widow, who was to have married the Duc de Riancourt a week from now. Earlier in the evening she had come to look at my house, with a view to purchasing it. She had purchased it, in fact. Astonished to see her again, I stood perfectly silent for a moment. And what do you suppose she said to me, in the most natural tone imaginable?

"'A thousand pardons for disturbing you, M. de Saint-Herem. I can say all I have to say in a couple of words. I am a widow. I am twenty-eight years old. I have no idea why I promised Riancourt that I would marry him, though very possibly I might have made this foolish marriage if I had not met you. You have a generous heart and a noble soul. The entertainment you gave this evening proves that. Your wit delights me, your character charms me, your goodness of heart touches me, and your personal appearance pleases me. So far as I, myself, am concerned, this step I am now taking should give you some idea of what kind of a person I am.

"'This peculiar and unconventional procedure on my part, you will understand, I think. If your impression of me is favourable, I shall be both proud and happy to become Madame de Saint-Herem, and live in the Hôtel Saint-Ramon with you. I have a colossal fortune. It

is at your disposal, for I trust my future to you, unreservedly, blindly. I shall await your decision anxiously. Good-evening.' And with these words the fairy disappeared, leaving me intoxicated with happiness at my good fortune."

"Florestan," said Louis, with a grave but affectionate air, "the confidence this young woman has shown in coming to you so frankly and confidingly throws a weighty responsibility upon you."

"I understand that," responded Saint-Herem, with undoubted sincerity. "I may have squandered the fortune that belonged to me, and ruined myself, but to squander a fortune that does not belong to me, and ruin a woman who trusts her future so unreservedly to me, would be infamous."

Madame Zomaloff married Florestan de Saint-Herem about one month after these events. Louis Richard, his father, and Mariette attended the wedding.

Father Richard, in spite of his resurrection, made no attempt to change the disposition Louis had made of his property up to the present time. The old man merely asked to be made steward of the home, and in that capacity he rendered very valuable assistance.

Every year, the twelfth of May is doubly celebrated.

Louis, his father, and Mariette, who are on the most intimate terms with M. and Madame de Saint-Herem, always attend the magnificent entertainment which is given at the Hôtel Saint-Ramon on the anniversary of the owner's betrothal, but at midnight Florestan and his wife, who adore each other, for this marriage became a love match, pure and simple, come to partake of the bridal supper at Father Richard's Home.

THE END.

THE SEVEN CARDINAL SINS

ANGER

ANGER.

CHAPTER I.

THE DUEL.

About the middle of the carnival season of 1801, a season enlivened by the news of the treaty of peace signed at Lunéville, when Bonaparte was First Consul of the French republic, the following scene took place in a secluded spot overshadowed by the partially dismantled ramparts of the city of Orléans.

It was seven o'clock in the morning, day was just dawning, and the cold was intense, as a tall man, enveloped in a big overcoat of a dark colour, walked to and fro blowing his fingers and stamping his feet, watching intently all the while a narrow footpath that wound around the side of the bastion. In about ten minutes another man, wrapped in a cloak, and heretofore concealed from sight by the projecting wall of the bastion, appeared in the path and hastily advanced toward the man in the long coat.

"I feared I should be late," remarked the man in the cloak.

"We have a quarter of an hour yet," replied the other. "Have you got the swords?"

"Here they are. I had a good deal of trouble in finding them; that was what detained me. Have you seen Yvon this morning?"

"No; he told me last night that I need not call for him. He feared that our going out together so early would excite his wife's suspicions."

"Well, while we are waiting for him, do enlighten me as to the cause of this quarrel. He was in too much of a hurry last night to tell me anything about the trouble."

"Well, this is about the long and short of it. At the last meeting of the court, a lawyer, named Laurent, made a rather transparent allusion to the pretended partiality of our friend, one of the judges before whom the case was tried."

"Such an insinuation was unworthy of the slightest notice. Yvon Cloarek's honesty is above suspicion."

"Of course; but you know our friend's extreme irascibility of temper, also, so, springing from his seat and interrupting the advocate in the middle of his discourse, he exclaimed: 'Monsieur Laurent, you are an infamous slanderer. I tell you this not as a magistrate, but as a man, and I will repeat the accusation after the session is over!' You can imagine the commotion this excited in the court-room. It was an odd thing for a magistrate to do, I must admit. Well, after the court adjourned, the other judges tried to appease Yvon, and so did the numerous members of the bar, but you know how pig-headed our friend is. Laurent, too, who is a stubborn sort of fellow, not only refused to apologise himself, but demanded that our friend should. I thought Yvon would choke with rage."

"It seems to me that our friend is right in resenting such an insinuation, but I fear that this duel will prove very detrimental to his career as a magistrate."

"I am afraid so, too, particularly as he has had several lively altercations with the presiding judge of the court, and his violent temper has already compelled him to change his place of residence twice."

"He is a noble fellow at heart, though."

"Yes, but his obstinacy and his hot temper make him very hard to get along with."

"With such a temperament, his choice of a career was very unfortunate, to say the least."

"Yes, but his father, who was a magistrate himself, was anxious his son should adopt the same profession. Yvon adored his father, so he consented. Afterward, when he lost his father, it was too late for our friend to change his profession, even if he had desired to do so; besides, he possesses no fortune, and he has a wife and child, so he has to make the best of the situation."

"That is true, but I pity him, nevertheless. But tell me, Yvon is a good swordsman, is he not?"

"Capital, for he was passionately fond of all such sports in his youth; but I am afraid his undoubted bravery and his hot temper will make him too rash."

"And his opponent?"

"Is considered quite skilful in the use of the weapon. I have a cab a little way off in case of an accident. Yvon lives almost on the edge of the town, fortunately."

"I can't bear to think of any such catastrophe. It would be the death of his wife. You have no idea how much she loves him. She is an angel of sweetness and goodness, and he, in turn, is perfectly devoted to her. They adore each other, and if — But there come the others. I am sorry Yvon did not get here before they did."

"Doubtless the precautions he was obliged to take on his wife's account detained him."

"Probably, but it is very annoying."

The three men who had just rounded the corner of the bastion proved to be Yvon's adversary and his two seconds. They all greeted the first comers with great courtesy, apologising for having kept them waiting, whereupon M. Cloarek's friends were obliged to reply that that gentleman had not yet arrived, but would doubtless be there in a minute or two.

One of the lawyer's seconds then suggested that, to

save time while awaiting M. Cloarek's arrival, they might decide upon the ground, and the choice had just been made when Yvon made his appearance. His panting breath and the perspiration that bedewed his forehead showed how he must have hurried to reach the place even at this late hour, and as he cordially shook hands with his seconds he remarked to them, in a low tone:

"I had no end of trouble in getting off without exciting my wife's suspicions."

Then addressing his adversary in a tone he tried his best to make calm and composed, he added:

"I beg a thousand pardons, monsieur, for having kept you waiting. I assure you the delay was wholly unintentional on my part."

The advocate bowed and proceeded to remove his overcoat, and his example was promptly followed by Cloarek, while the seconds measured the swords. In fact, so great was Yvon's alacrity and ardour, that he was ready for the fray before his opponent, and would have hastily rushed upon him if his seconds had not seized him by the arm.

When the signal was at last given, Cloarek attacked his opponent with such impetuosity that, though the latter tried his best to parry his adversary's rapid thrusts, his guard was beaten down, and in less than two minutes he had received a wound in the forearm which compelled him to drop his weapon.

"Enough, gentlemen!" exclaimed the seconds, on seeing one of the combatants disabled.

But, unfortunately, the Breton had become so frantic with rage, that he did not hear this "Enough, gentlemen," and was about to renew the attack, when his opponent, who had conducted himself very creditably up to that time, being wholly unable to offer any further resistance, made a sudden spring backwards, and then started to run. The now thoroughly enraged Breton

was starting in pursuit of him, when his seconds rushed upon him and disarmed him, though not without a fierce struggle and considerable danger, while one of the advocate's seconds bound up his slight wound with a handkerchief. Cloarek's second courteously offered his cab to the wounded man, who accepted it, and the parties separated amicably.

"What were you thinking of, Yvon, to rush upon an unarmed enemy?" asked one of the irascible magistrate's friends, as they wended their way back to the city.

"I could not believe it was over so soon," replied Yvon, with a sigh of regret.

"The fight couldn't last long at the rate you were going on."

"If I could only have an hour's fighting, it seems to me I might be peaceable for a long time," replied Yvon, so naïvely that his friends could not help laughing.

"Well, what of it?" stormed the choleric Breton, with a wrathful glance at his companions.

Then, ashamed of this ebullition of temper, he hung his head as one of his seconds retorted, gaily:

"You needn't try to pick a quarrel with us, my dear fellow. It wouldn't be worth your while. We should only be able to furnish you with a couple of minutes' amusement."

"Yes, yes, be sensible, my dear fellow," good-naturedly remarked the other second. "You ought to consider yourself very fortunate that this affair ended as it did. You are not injured at all, and your adversary's wound is very slight, — a very fortunate ending, you must admit. How we should have felt if we had had to carry you home dead! Think of your wife and your little daughter."

"My wife and daughter!" exclaimed Cloarek, with a violent start. "Ah, yes, you are right."

And the tears rose to his eyes.

"I am a fool, and worse than a fool," he exclaimed.

"But it is not my fault. A man who has too much blood is always quarrelling, as they used to say down in Brittany."

"Then you had better put your feet in mustard water and call in a doctor to bleed you, my friend, but don't take a sword for a lancet, and, above all, don't draw blood from others under the pretext that you have too much yourself."

"And above all, remember that you are a magistrate, a man of peace," added the other.

"That is all very fine," retorted Yvon, with a sigh, "but you don't know what it is to have a judge's robe on your back and too much blood in your veins."

After he had thanked his seconds heartily for their kind offices, Cloarek was about to separate from them when one of them remarked: "We shall see each other again at the masquerade ball this evening, of course. I understand that all you reverend judges are to allow yourselves considerable license this evening, and disport yourselves like ordinary mortals."

"I did not intend to go, as my wife is not as well as usual; but she insisted so much that I finally consented," replied Yvon.

As he reëntered his house, longing to embrace his wife and child even more tenderly than usual, he was accosted by a servant, who said:

"There is a man in your office who wants to see you. His business is urgent, he says."

"Very well. My wife did not ask for me after I went out, did she?"

"No, monsieur, she gave Dame Roberts orders that she was not to be disturbed until she rang, as she wanted to sleep a little later than usual this morning."

"Then take care that she is not disturbed on my account," said Cloarek, as he entered his office.

The person who was waiting for him was a tall, stout man about forty years of age, of herculean stature, with

a coarse face, and clad in countrified garments. Bowing awkwardly to Yvon, he asked:

"Are you Judge Cloarek?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"I am a friend of Father Leblanc, at Gien. You remember him, don't you?"

"Yes, and a very worthy man he is. How is his health?"

"Very good, judge. It was he who said to me: 'If you're in trouble, go to Judge Cloarek, he is always kind to us poor folks.'"

"What can I do for you?"

"I am the father of a young man who is soon to be tried before your court."

"To what case do you allude, monsieur?"

"To the case of Joseph Rateau," said the big man, with a meaning wink, "charged with forgery — only forgery."

Cloarek, surprised and displeased at the careless manner in which the father spoke of the weighty accusation that was hanging over his son, answered, sternly:

"Yes, monsieur, a prisoner, Joseph Rateau, who is accused of the crime of forgery, is soon to be tried."

"Yes, judge, and as there's no use beating about the bush, I may as well say that my son did it, and then, like a fool, allowed himself to be caught."

"Take care what you say, monsieur. This is a very grave admission on your part."

"Oh, well, there is no use denying it, judge. It's as plain as the nose on your face; but for that, do you suppose I would have come here —"

"Not another word, monsieur; not another word!" exclaimed Yvon, crimsoning with indignation and anger.

"I quite agree with you, judge. What is the use of talking so much, anyway? Actions speak louder than words."

And putting his hand in one of the pockets of his

long overcoat, he drew out a roll of money and, holding it up between his thumb and forefinger, he remarked, with a cunning smile and another knowing wink:

"There are fifty louis in here, and if you secure my son's acquittal, you shall have another fifty."

The austerity and incorruptibility of the early days of the republic had given place to a deplorable laxness of morals, so the petitioner, believing his case won, triumphantly deposited his roll of gold on a corner of a desk near the door. Cloarek, quite beside himself with rage now, was about to give vent to his wrath and indignation when, his eyes chancing to fall upon a portrait of his wife that was hanging on the wall opposite him, he remembered that she might be disturbed and frightened by the noise, as she occupied the room directly over his office, so, with an almost superhuman effort, he managed to control himself and, picking up his hat, said to the countryman:

"Take your money. We will talk this matter over outside."

The countryman, fancying that the judge was influenced solely by prudential motives, put the money back in his pocket, and, taking his big stick unsuspectingly, followed Cloarek out of the house.

"Where are you going, judge?" he asked, as he lumbered along, finding it difficult to keep up with Cloarek, as the latter strode swiftly on.

"This way," replied Yvon, in a smothered voice, as he turned the corner of the next street.

This street led to the market-place, which was generally crowded with people at that hour of the day. When Cloarek reached this square, he suddenly turned upon the countryman, and, seizing him by the cravat, cried, in tones of thunder:

"Look, good people, at this scoundrel. Look at him well, and then witness his chastisement."

The days of popular agitation were not entirely over,

and appeals to the populace as well as debates and harangues in public places were by no means rare, so a crowd speedily gathered around the judge and the countryman, who, in spite of his gigantic stature, had not succeeded in freeing himself from the iron grasp of Cloarek, who, shaking him violently, continued in even more vociferous tones:

"I am judge of the court in this town, and this wretch has offered me gold to acquit a criminal. That is the indignity he has offered me, and this is going to be his punishment."

And this strange magistrate, whose rage and indignation seemed to endow him with superhuman strength, began to beat the stalwart countryman unmercifully, but the latter, wrenching himself from his assailant's grasp, sprang back a foot or two, and, lifting his heavy stick, would probably have inflicted a mortal blow upon the enraged Breton if the latter, by one of those adroit manœuvres well known to his compatriots, had not avoided the danger by stooping and rushing, with lowered head, straight upon his adversary with such violence that the terrible blow, delivered straight in the chest, broke two of his ribs, and threw him backward upon the ground unconscious; then, taking advantage of the excitement in the crowd, Cloarek, desirous of escaping a public ovation if possible, hurried away, and, catching sight of an empty cab, sprang into it and ordered the driver to take him to the Palace of Justice, the hour for the court to open having arrived.

CHAPTER II.

ANOTHER EBULLITION OF TEMPER.

We will leave M. Cloarek to make his way to the court-house after exploits which would have done honour to one of the gladiators of old, and say a few words in regard to the masquerade ball, to which the impetuous magistrate's seconds had referred on their way back to town after the duel.

This ball, a bold innovation for a provincial town, was to take place that same evening at the house of M. Bonneval, a wealthy merchant, and the father-in-law of the presiding judge of the court to which Yvon Cloarek belonged, and all the members of the court having been invited to this entertainment, and some disguise being obligatory, it had been decided to wear either a black domino, or costumes of a sufficiently grave character not to compromise the dignity of the body.

Cloarek was one of the invited guests. The account of his duel of the morning as well as the chastisement he had inflicted upon the countryman, though noised about the town, had not reached Madame Cloarek's ears at nightfall, so the magistrate's household was calm, and occupied, like many others in the town, in preparations for the evening's festivities, for in those days masquerade parties were rare in the provinces. The dining-room of the modest home, strewn with fabrics of divers colours as well as scraps of gold and silver embroidery and braid, looked very much like a dressmaker's estab-

lishment. Three young sewing-women chattering like magpies were working there under the superintendence of an honest, pleasant-faced woman about thirty years of age, whom they called Dame Roberts. This worthy woman, after having served as a nurse for M. Cloarek's daughter, now acted as maid, or rather confidential attendant to Madame Cloarek; for, in consequence of her devotion and faithful service, relations of affectionate familiarity had been established between her and her mistress.

"One scallop more, and this embroidered ribbon will be sewed on the hat," remarked one of the young sewing-women.

"I have finished hemming the sash," remarked the second girl.

"I have only two more silver buttons to sew on the waistcoat," added the third.

"That is well, girls," said Dame Roberts. "M. Cloarek's costume will be one of the most effective there, I am sure."

"It seems very odd to think of a judge in a masquerade costume, all the same."

"Nonsense! don't they disguise themselves every day when they put their robes on?"

"A judge's robe is not a disguise, but a badge of office, you ought to understand," said Dame Roberts, severely.

"Excuse me, Dame Roberts," replied the offender, blushing to the roots of her hair, "I meant no harm, I am sure."

"What a pity it is that Madame Cloarek is not going!" remarked one of the other girls, in the hope of giving a more agreeable turn to the conversation.

"Ah, if I were in Madame Cloarek's place, I wouldn't miss such an opportunity. A masquerade ball! why, it is a piece of good fortune that may present itself but once in a lifetime. But here comes M. Segoffin. Good

day, M. Segoffin! And how does M. Segoffin find himself to-day?"

The newcomer was a tall, thin man about forty years of age, with an immensely long nose, slightly turned up at the end, which imparted a very peculiar expression to his face. His complexion was so white and his beardless face so impassible that he looked exactly like a clown, and the resemblance was heightened by a pair of piercing black eyes, which gave a mocking expression to his face, and by a small, round black wig. A long gray overcoat, brown knee-breeches, blue and white striped stockings, and low shoes with big silver buckles formed the every-day costume of M. Segoffin, who carried a red umbrella under his arm and an old cocked hat in his hand.

After having remained twenty years in the service of M. Cloarek's father, at that gentleman's death he transferred his allegiance to the son whom he had known as a child, and whom he served with unwearying devotion.

On his entrance, as we have just remarked, he was greeted with mocking laughs and exclamations of —

"Here comes M. Segoffin. Ah, good day, M. Segoffin!" But without losing his habitual *sang-froid* in the least, he laid his umbrella and hat down on a chair, and, seizing the prettiest of his tormentors in his long arms, kissed her loudly on both cheeks in spite of her shrieks and spirited resistance. Well satisfied with this beginning, he was preparing to repeat the offence when Madame Roberts, seizing him by one of his coat-tails, exclaimed, indignantly:

"Segoffin, Segoffin! such behaviour is outrageous!"

"That which is done is done," said Segoffin, sententiously, passing his long, bony hand across his lips with an air of retrospective enjoyment, as the young sewing-woman quitted the room with her companions, all laughing like mad and exclaiming: "Good night, M. Segoffin, good night."

Left alone with the delinquent, Dame Roberts exclaimed:

"Would any one on earth but you coolly commit such enormities in the respectable household of a magistrate?"

"What on earth do you mean, I should like to know?"

"Why, hugging and kissing that girl right under my very nose when you are persecuting me with your declarations of love all the time."

"I do believe you're jealous!"

"Jealous! Get that idea out of your head as soon as possible. If I ever do marry again, — which God forbid! — it certainly will not be you I choose for a husband."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Perfectly sure."

"That which is to be, will be, my dear."

"But —"

"Nonsense!" exclaimed her phlegmatic companion, interrupting her with the most positive air imaginable. "You are dying to marry me, and you will marry me, so it is not worth while to say any more about it."

"You are right," exclaimed the woman, exasperated by her interlocutor's overweening conceit. "I think, with you, that we had better drop the subject. Monsieur's costume is finished. Take it up to his room, for he will return from court very soon, I am sure."

"From court," sighed Segoffin, shaking his head sadly.

A sigh was such a rare thing for this impassive individual to indulge in, that Dame Roberts's anxiety was aroused, and she asked, quickly:

"Why are you sighing like a furnace, you who display no emotion at all, ordinarily?"

"I expected it," remarked Segoffin, shaking his head dubiously.

"What has happened? Tell me at once, for Heaven's sake."

"M. Cloarek has thrown the chief judge of the court

out of the window," responded Segoffin, with another sigh.

"*Mon Dieu!*"

"There is no undoing that which is done."

"But what you say is absurd."

"It was out of a window on the first floor, so he didn't have far to fall," said Segoffin, thoughtfully, "and the presiding judge is sure to have landed on his feet as usual. He's a sharp fellow."

"Look here, Segoffin, I don't believe a single word you're telling me. It is only one of those cock-and-bull stories you're so fond of inventing, and it is really a shame for you to make merry at monsieur's expense, when he has always been so kind to you."

"Very well, you may think I am joking, if you want to," replied Segoffin, coldly, "but you had better give me monsieur's costume. He told me to take it up to his room, and he will be here before very long now."

"It is really true that there has been a scene between monsieur and the chief judge, then?" exclaimed Suzanne.

"Of course, as monsieur threw him out of the window."

"Oh, *mon Dieu! mon Dieu!* Monsieur will lose his place this time, then."

"Why?"

"Why? Why, after such scandalous behaviour on the part of a magistrate he is sure to lose his office, I tell you, and poor madame! What a shock it will be to her in her condition. What a life she leads! obliged to be always on the watch, adoring her husband, but in mortal terror all the while as to what he may say or do. But tell me how you happened to hear of this calamity."

"Well, I went to the palace an hour ago to take monsieur a letter. I found the whole place in a hubbub. The lawyers and all the rest of the people in the building were racing to and fro, and asking: 'Have you heard about it?' 'Is it possible?' It seems that after the court adjourned, the presiding judge summoned M.

Cloarek into his office. He wanted to see him about his duel, some said."

"His duel? What duel?"

"The duel he fought this morning," answered Segoffin, phlegmatically.

And taking advantage of his companion's speechless consternation, he continued:

"Others declared that the chief judge had sent for him to see about a fracas monsieur had had with a countryman whom he nearly killed."

"What countryman?" asked Suzanne, with increasing alarm.

"The last one," answered Segoffin, naïvely. "Well, it seems, or at least so they told me at the palace, that monsieur went into the presiding judge's private office; they got to quarrelling, and one man finally threw the other man out of the window, and I know monsieur so well," added Segoffin, with a satisfied smile, "that I said to myself, 'If any one was thrown out of the window it must have been the other man, not monsieur,' and I was right. There is no undoing that which has been done."

"There is no undoing that which has been done? That tiresome old saying is for ever in your mouth, it seems to me. Is it possible you cannot see the consequences of all this?"

"What is to be, will be."

"Fine consolation that, is it not? This is the third time monsieur has run a great risk of losing his place in consequence of giving way to his temper, and this time he will be put out, sure."

"Well, if he loses his place, he will lose it."

"Indeed! But he needs the office on account of his wife and little daughter, and as there will be still another mouth to feed before many months have passed, what is to become of him and his family if he loses his position?"

"Your question is too much for me. I had better be getting up-stairs with this toggery, I know that, though."

"Have you lost your senses completely? Monsieur isn't really thinking of going to this entertainment to-night, after what has occurred!"

"He isn't? That shows how much you know about it."

"But after what has occurred, he surely will not go to this ball, I say."

"You see if he doesn't."

"What, go to a ball given by the presiding judge's father-in-law?"

"He is all the more likely to on that very account."

"But it is impossible, I tell you. Monsieur would not dare after all the scandalous occurrences of this unfortunate day. The whole town will be up in arms if he does."

"He is ready for them."

"He is ready for them?"

"Most assuredly. He is not the man to draw back, no matter how many persons league themselves together against him," responded Segoffin, with a triumphant air. "I saw him after his row with the presiding judge, and I said to him, 'Aren't you afraid you will be arrested, M. Yvon?' 'No one has any business to meddle with what passed between me and the chief justice so long as he doesn't complain, and he is not likely to do that, for if the cause of our quarrel should be made public he would be hopelessly disgraced.' Those were monsieur's very words, Suzanne. 'Well, will you go to the ball just the same?' I asked. 'Certainly. I intend to be the first to go and the last to leave. Otherwise people might think I regretted what I had done, or that I was afraid. If my presence at this fête scandalises anybody, and they show it in any way, I shall know what to say and do, never fear; so go back home, and have my costume ready for me when I get there.'"

"What a man of iron he is!" sighed Suzanne. "Always the same, and poor madame suspects nothing."

ANOTHER EBULLITION OF TEMPER.

"I will take the costume up to monsieur's room and wait for him there, for I am as certain that he will go to this entertainment as I am that you will marry me some day, remember that.

"If such a misfortune is ever to befall me, I shall try to keep it out of my mind as much as possible," retorted Dame Roberts, curtly, as she hastened off to her mistress.

CHAPTER III.

THE WARNING.

At first Suzanne felt strongly inclined to inform Madame Cloarek of the momentous events which had occurred that day, but after reflecting on the effect this news might have upon the young wife, she abandoned that idea and resolved to confine herself to an effort to make her mistress devise some pretext for preventing M. Cloarek from attending the masquerade ball, realising that such an audacious act on his part might have the most disastrous consequences.

Suzanne's position was extremely trying, for it was necessary for her to conceal the events of the day from her mistress, on the one hand, and yet implore her to use her influence over her husband to prevent him from going to this entertainment, on the other.

She was consequently in a very perplexed frame of mind when she entered the apartment of her mistress, who, without being really beautiful in the general acceptation of the word, had a remarkably sweet and attractive face, though the extreme pallor of her complexion and her frail appearance generally indicated very delicate health.

Jenny Cloarek, seated beside a swinging crib, the silken curtains of which were closely drawn, was occupied with some embroidery, while with her little foot she occasionally imparted a gentle oscillatory motion to the little bed in which her five-year-old daughter was repos-

ing. It was night, and the soft light of a lamp illumined the peaceful picture.

When Suzanne entered the room, Madame Cloarek held up a finger warningly, and said to her, in a low tone:

"Don't make a noise, Suzanne. My little Sabine is just going to sleep."

And as the maid approached on tiptoe her mistress added: "Has my husband returned yet?"

"No, madame."

"His going out so early this morning upset me for all day, for I was asleep when he came back, and so long a time seldom elapses without my seeing him. By the way, is his costume finished, and is it a success? You know I promised my husband I would make no attempt to see it until I could see it on him."

"It is very handsome, madame."

"And you think it will prove becoming?"

"Extremely, madame."

"I am almost sorry now that I made up my mind not to go to this entertainment. I never attended a masquerade ball in my life, and I should have enjoyed it immensely; but I shall enjoy Yvon's account of it almost as much, provided he does not stay too late, for I feel rather more tired and weak than usual to-day, it seems to me."

"Madame does not feel as well as usual this evening?"

"No; still I do not complain, for it is one of those sufferings that promise me new joys," she added, with a smile of ineffable sweetness.

As she spoke the young mother leaned forward and cautiously parted the curtains of the crib, then after a moment of blissful contemplation she added, as she again settled herself in her armchair:

"The dear little thing is sleeping very sweetly, now. Ah, my good Suzanne, with a husband and child like

mine, what more could I ask for in this world, unless it be a little better health so I may be able to nurse my next child, for do you know, Suzanne, I used to be dreadfully jealous of you for acting as part mother to my little Sabine? But now my health is better, it seems to me I have nothing more to ask for. Even my dear Yvon's impetuosity, which used to cause me so much uneasiness, seems to have subsided of late. Poor fellow, how often I witnessed his efforts to overcome, not a fault, but his very nature. Had it been a fault, with his energy and determination of character, he would have overcome it years and years ago; but at last, thank Heaven, his disposition seems to have become much more even."

"Undoubtedly, madame," replied Suzanne, "monsieur's temper is much more even now."

"And when I think how kind and gentle he has always been to me," continued the young wife, tenderly, "and how I have never been the object or the cause of any of the terrible ebullitions of temper which I have witnessed with so much terror, and which have often proved so disastrous in their consequences to him, I realise how devotedly he must love me!"

"He would indeed be a madman to fly in a passion with one as kind and gentle as you, my poor dear lady."

"Hush, flatterer," replied Jenny, smiling. "It is not my amiability of disposition, but his love for me that prevents it, and though I am almost ashamed to confess it, I cannot help feeling proud sometimes when I think that I have never excited any feeling but the tenderest consideration in such an impassioned and indomitable nature."

"Monsieur is really one of the best-hearted men in the world, madame, and, as you say, it must be his temperament that carries him away in spite of himself, for unfortunately with characters like these the merest trifle may lead to a terrible explosion."

"What you say is so true, Suzanne, that my poor

husband, in order not to expose himself to dangers of that kind, spends nearly all his evenings at home with me instead of seeking amusement as so many persons do in public places where his quick temper might involve him in endless difficulties."

"I think, madame, with you, that for your own peace of mind, and monsieur's as well, it is advisable to avoid all places where there is any danger of one's anger being aroused, so, madame, if you will take my advice — "

"Well, Suzanne, why do you pause so suddenly? What is the matter?"

"I — I — "

"Go on, Suzanne."

"Don't you fear that the masquerade ball this evening — "

"Well?"

"Is a rather dangerous place for monsieur to go?"

"What an absurd idea!"

"There will be a great many people there."

"True; but they will be the best people in town, as the ball is given by the father-in-law of the presiding judge."

"Undoubtedly, madame, but I think I have heard that people chaff each other a good deal at these masquerade balls, and if monsieur, being quick-tempered, should take offence — "

"You are right, Suzanne. I had not thought of that."

"I don't like to worry you, madame, still — "

"On the other hand, my husband is too much of a gentleman, and too used to the ways of the world, to take offence at any of the liberties permissible at such an entertainment; besides, his intimate relations with the court over which M. Bonneval's son-in-law presides make it almost obligatory upon him to attend this ball, for it having been agreed that all the members of the court should go, Yvon's absence might be considered a mark of disrespect to the presiding judge, to whom my husband is really subordinate."

"My poor lady! if she but knew how her husband evinces his subordination to the presiding judge," thought Suzanne.

"No, you need have no fear, Suzanne," continued the young wife, "the presiding judge's very presence at this entertainment, the deference Yvon must feel for him, will necessitate the maintenance of the utmost decorum on his part; besides, my husband's absence would be sure to excite remark."

"Still, madame —"

"Oh, I shall urge Yvon to be very prudent," added Jenny, smiling, "but I see no reason why he should not avail himself of an opportunity for enjoyment that our retired life will make doubly pleasant to him."

So Suzanne, fearing the consequences of her mistress's blindness, said, resolutely:

"Madame, monsieur must not be allowed to attend this fête."

"I do not understand you, Suzanne."

"Heed what I say, madame, and for your own sake and the sake of your child prevent monsieur from attending this entertainment," exclaimed Suzanne, clasping her hands imploringly.

"What is the matter, Suzanne? You alarm me."

"You know how entirely I am devoted to you, madame?"

"Yes; but explain."

"You know perfectly well, too, that I would not run any risk of alarming you if it were not absolutely necessary. Believe me, some terrible misfortune is likely to happen if monsieur attends this fête."

Dame Roberts could say no more, for just then the door opened, and Yvon Cloarek entered his wife's room. Suzanne dared not remain any longer, so she departed, but not until after she had given her mistress one more imploring look.

CHAPTER IV.

"THOSE WHOM THE GODS DESTROY THEY FIRST MAKE MAD."

YVON CLOAREK was only about thirty years of age, and the Breton costume in which he had just arrayed himself set off his robust and symmetrical figure to admirable advantage.

This severe but elegant costume consisted of a rather long black jacket elaborately embroidered with yellow on the collar and sleeves, and still further ornamented with rows of tiny silver buttons set very close together. The waistcoat, too, was black, and trimmed with embroidery and buttons to match the jacket. A broad sash of orange silk encircled the waist. Large trousers of white linen, almost as wide as the floating skirt of the Greek Palikares, extended to the knee. Below, his shapely limbs were encased in tight-fitting buckskin leggings. He wore a round, nearly flat hat, encircled with an orange ribbon embroidered with silver, the ends of which hung down upon his shoulders. Thanks to this costume and to his thick golden hair, his eyes blue as the sea itself, his strong features, and his admirable carriage, Cloarek was an admirable type of the valiant race of Breton Bretons, of the sturdy sons of Armorica, as the historians style them.

When he entered his wife's room, Yvon's face was still a trifle clouded, and though he made a powerful effort to conceal the feelings which the exciting events of the day had aroused, his wife, whose apprehensions had already been awakened by Dame Roberts's warning,

was struck by the expression of his face. He, entirely ignorant of these suspicions on her part, having done everything possible to conceal the disquieting occurrences of the day from her, approached very slowly and pausing a few steps from his wife, asked, smilingly:

"Well, how do you like my costume, Jenny? I hope I am faithful to the traditions of my native province, and that I shall represent Brittany creditably at the fête?"

"There isn't the slightest doubt that the costume of your native province is wonderfully becoming," replied the young mother, with some embarrassment.

"Really? Well, I am delighted," said Yvon, kissing his wife fondly; "you know I set great store by your approval even in the most trifling matters, my dear."

"Yes," replied Madame Cloarek, with deep feeling, "yes, I know your tender love for me, your deference to my slightest wish."

"Great credit I deserve for that! It is so easy and pleasant to defer to you, my Jenny, — to bow this hard, stiff Breton neck before you, and say: 'I abdicate to you. Command; I will obey.'"

"Ah, my dear Yvon, if you only knew how happy it makes me to hear you say that, to-day especially."

These last words failed to attract Yvon's attention, however, and he continued:

"What are the little concessions I make, my dearest, in comparison with the blissful happiness I owe to you? Think," he added, turning to the crib, "this little angel that is the joy of my life, who gave her to me?" And he was about to open the curtains, when his wife said to him, warningly:

"Take care, Yvon, she is asleep."

"Let me just take one peep at her, only one. I have not seen her all day."

"The light of the lamp might arouse her, my dear, and the poor little thing has just had such a trying time."

"What! has she been ill?" inquired Cloarek, anxiously, leaving the cradle. "Do you really feel uneasy about her?"

"Not now, my dear, but you know how extremely nervous and excitable she is. She resembles me only too much in this respect," added Jenny, with a melancholy smile.

"And I, far from regretting that the dear child is so impressionable, rejoice at it, on the contrary, for I hope she will be endowed with the same exquisite sensibility of feeling that you are."

The young woman gently shook her head.

"This is what happened. Our big Newfoundland dog came into the room, and frightened the poor little thing so that I had great difficulty in quieting her afterward."

"I am thankful it was nothing serious. But how have you passed the day? You were asleep this morning, and I would not wake you. You know how much solicitude I always feel about your health, but it is even more precious to me than ever now," he added, smiling tenderly upon her.

Jenny slipped her little frail white hand into her husband's.

"What courage your love gives me," she murmured, softly. "Thanks to that, I can even bear suffering bravely."

"Then you have not been feeling as well as usual to-day?" exclaimed Yvon, anxiously. "Tell me, Jenny, why didn't you send for the doctor?"

"I did not need to, for have I not a great and learned physician in whom I have perfect confidence, and who I am sure will not refuse me any attention I ask?"

"Yes, I understand. I am that great and learned physician, I suppose."

"And could I select a more careful and devoted one?"

"No, certainly not; so go on and consult me, Jenny."

"My dear Yvon, though I have not undergone any

very severe suffering to-day, I have experienced and I still experience a sort of vague uneasiness, as well as an unusual depression of spirits. Oh, don't be alarmed, it is nothing serious; besides, you can cure me completely if you will, my beloved doctor."

"How? Tell me at once."

"But will you do it?"

"Why, Jenny, — what a question!"

"I repeat that my cure depends absolutely and entirely upon you."

"So much the better, then, for, in that case, you are cured. Go on; explain, my charming invalid."

"Remain with me, then."

"Have I any intention of leaving you?"

"But the entertainment this evening?" ventured the young wife, hesitatingly.

"I dressed early, you see, so as to be able to remain with you until the very last moment."

"Don't leave me this evening, Yvon."

"What?"

"Give up this fête for my sake."

"You cannot mean it, surely."

"Stay at home with me."

"But, Jenny, you yourself insisted that —"

"That you should accept the invitation. That is true. This very morning I was rejoicing that you were going to have this diversion, — you who lead such an extremely quiet life."

"Then why have you changed your mind so suddenly?"

"How can I tell?" responded the young wife, much embarrassed. "It is only an absurd and senseless whim on my part, doubtless. All I know is that you would make me happy, oh, very happy, if you would do what I ask, absurd and ridiculous as it may appear to you."

"My poor darling," Yvon said, tenderly, after a

moment's reflection, "in your condition, and nervous as you are, I can easily understand why you should, in spite of your good sense, be beset with all sorts of contradictory notions, and that you should be averse in the evening to what you most wished for in the morning. Do you suppose I should think of such a thing as blaming you for that?"

"You are the best and most kind-hearted man in the world, Yvon!" exclaimed the young wife, her eyes filling with tears of joy, for she felt sure now that her husband was going to accede to her wishes. "There are not many men who would be so patient with the whims of a poor woman who knows neither what she wants nor why she wants it."

"But in my character of physician I do, you see," replied Yvon, kissing his wife's brow tenderly. "Look," he added, glancing at the clock, "it is now nine o'clock; ten minutes to go, ten to return, and a quarter of an hour to remain at the ball, — it is a matter of three-quarters of an hour at most. I will be back here by ten o'clock, I promise you."

"What, Yvon, you persist in your determination to attend this entertainment?"

"Just to show myself there, that is all."

"I beg you will not, Yvon."

"What do you mean?"

"Don't go."

"What! not even for a few moments?"

"Do not leave me this evening, I entreat you."

"But, be reasonable, Jenny."

"Make this slight sacrifice for my sake, I implore you."

"But, Jenny, this is childish."

"Call it childishness, idiocy, what you will, but don't leave me this evening."

"Jenny, love, it breaks my heart to see you so unreasonable, for I am obliged to refuse you."

"Yvon —"

"It is absolutely necessary for me to show myself at this entertainment, though I need remain only a few moments."

"But, my dear Yvon —"

A flush of impatience mounted to Cloarek's brow, nevertheless he controlled himself, and said to his wife in the same affectionate though slightly reproachful tone:

"Such persistency on your part surprises me, Jenny. You know I am not in the habit of having to be begged. On the contrary, I have always endeavoured to anticipate your wishes, so spare me the annoyance of being obliged to say 'no' to you for the first time in my life."

"Great Heavens!" exclaimed the now thoroughly distressed woman, "to think of your attaching so much importance to a mere pleasure —"

"Pleasure!" exclaimed Yvon, bitterly, his eyes kindling. Then restraining himself, he added:

"If it were a question of pleasure, you would not have been obliged to ask me but once, Jenny."

"But if you are not going for pleasure, why do you go at all?"

"I am going for appearance's sake," replied Yvon, promptly.

"In that case, can't you let appearances go, just this once, for my sake?"

"I must attend this entertainment, Jenny," said Yvon, whose face had become purple now; "I must and shall, so say no more about it."

"And I say that you shall not," exclaimed the young woman, unable to conceal her alarm any longer; "for there must be some grave reason that you are concealing from me to make you persist in refusing, when you are always so kind and affectionate to me."

"Jenny!" exclaimed Cloarek, stamping his foot,

angrily, for this opposition was intensely exasperating to a person of his irascible nature, "not another word! Do you hear me? Not another word!"

"Listen to me, Yvon," said his wife, with dignity. "I shall resort to subterfuge no longer. It is unworthy of us both. I am afraid, yes, afraid for you to go to this fête, for I have been told that your presence there might cause trouble."

"Who told you that? who said that? Answer me!" cried Cloarek, in a more and more angry tone, and so loudly that the child in the crib woke. "Why should you feel afraid? You have heard something, then, I suppose."

"There is something, then, Yvon," cried the poor woman, more and more alarmed. "There is some terrible thing that you are keeping from me!"

Yvon remained silent and motionless for a moment, for a violent struggle was going on in his breast, but calmness and reason finally conquered, and approaching his wife to kiss her before going out, he said:

"I shall return almost immediately, Jenny. You will not have to wait for me long."

But the young woman hastily sprang up, and, before her husband could make a movement to prevent it, she had run to the door, locked it, and removed the key; then turning to Yvon, she said, with all the energy of despair:

"You shall not leave this room. We will see if you dare to come and take this key from me."

Utterly stupefied at first, then exasperated beyond expression by Jenny's determined action, he gave way to his anger to such an extent that his features became unrecognisable. The flush that had suffused his face was succeeded by a livid pallor, his eyes became bloodshot, and, advancing threateningly toward his wife, he exclaimed, in a terrible voice:

"The key! give me the key!"

"No, I will save you in spite of yourself," replied Jenny, intrepidly.

"Wretch!" cried Cloarek, now completely beside himself.

The young woman had never been the object of her husband's anger before in her life, so it is impossible to convey any idea of the horror she experienced on seeing him ready to rush upon her. Terrified by his ferocious, bloodthirsty look, in which there seemed to be not even the slightest gleam of recognition, she remained for a moment trembling and motionless, feeling as if she were about to swoon. Suddenly the little girl, who had been awakened several minutes before by the loud talking, parted the curtains of her crib and looked out. Not recognising her father, and mistaking him for a stranger, as she had never before seen him in such a costume, she uttered a shrill cry of terror, and exclaimed:

"Oh, mamma, the black man! the black man!"

"The key! give me the key!" repeated Cloarek, in thunder tones, taking another step toward his wife, who, slipping the key in her bosom, ran to the crib and caught her child in her arms, while the little girl, more and more terrifred, hid her face on her mother's breast, sobbing:

"Oh, that black man, that black man, he means to kill mamma!"

"To take this key from me, you will have to tear my child from my arms," said the frail but courageous woman.

"You don't know that I am capable of anything when I am angry," exclaimed the unfortunate man, aroused to such a pitch of fury as to be blind and deaf to the most sacred sentiments. As he spoke, he rushed toward his wife in such a frenzied, menacing manner that the unfortunate woman, believing herself lost, strained her little daughter to her breast, and, bowing her head, cried:

"Spare, oh, spare my child!"

This cry of agony and of maternal despair penetrated to the innermost depths of Yvon's soul. He stopped short, then quicker than thought he turned, and, with a strength that his fury rendered irresistible, dashed himself against the door with such impetuosity that it gave way.

On hearing the sound, Madame Cloarek raised her head in even greater terror, for her child was in convulsions, caused by fright, and seemed likely to die in her arms.

"Help!" faltered Jenny, faintly. "Help, Yvon, our child is dying!"

A despairing cry answered these panting words uttered by Jenny, who felt that she, too, was dying, for in this delicate woman's critical condition such a shock was almost certain to prove fatal.

"Yvon, our child is dying!"

Cloarek, who was still only a few yards off, heard these lamentable words. The horror of the thought that his child was dying dispelled his anger as if by magic, and, rushing wildly back into his wife's room, he saw her still standing by the crib, but already as livid as a spectre.

With a supreme effort Jenny extended her arms to place her child in her husband's hands, faltering:

"Take her, I am dying," and without another word fell heavily at the feet of Cloarek, who, with his child strained to his breast, stood as if dazed, hearing nothing, seeing nothing.

CHAPTER V.

DEADLY ENMITY.

TWELVE years after the events we have just related, late in the month of March, 1812, about two o'clock in the afternoon a traveller walked into the inn known as the Imperial Eagle, the only tavern in the town of Sorville, which was then the second station on the post-road between Dieppe and Paris.

This traveller, who was a man in the prime of life, wore a tarpaulin hat and a thick blue reefer jacket, and looked like a petty officer or a sailing master in the merchant service. His hair and whiskers were red, his complexion light, his expression stern and impassible, and he spoke French without the slightest accent though he was an Englishman.

Walking straight up to the landlord, he said: "Can you tell me if a dark-complexioned man dressed about as I am, but very dark-complexioned and with a strong Italian accent, did not come here this morning? His name is Pietri."

"I have seen no one answering either to that name or description, monsieur."

"Are you sure?"

"Perfectly sure."

"Is there any other inn in the town?"

"No, thank Heaven! monsieur, so parties travelling either by diligence or post patronise me, as the post-station is only a few yards from my door."

"So there is a relay station near here."

"On the other side of the street, almost directly opposite."

"Can you give me a room and have a breakfast prepared for two persons? I am expecting some one who will call and inquire for Master Dupont, for that is my name."

"Very well, monsieur."

"As soon as this person comes, you will serve breakfast in my room."

"Very well, and monsieur's baggage, shall I send for that?"

"I have no baggage. Have many post-carriages passed to-day?"

"Not a single one, monsieur."

"Neither from Paris nor Dieppe?"

"No, monsieur, neither from Paris nor Dieppe. But, by the way, as you came from the last named place, you must have seen those wonderful men everybody is talking about."

"What wonderful men?"

"Why, that famous corsair who is death to the English, the brave Captain l'Endurci (a good name for a privateer, isn't it?). With his brig *The Hell-hound* (another appropriate name by the way), that goes through the water like a fish, not a single English ship seems to escape him. He gobbles them all up, his last haul being a number of vessels loaded with wheat, that he captured after a terrible fight. A wonderful piece of good luck, for wheat is so scarce now! They say the people of Dieppe have gone wild over him! He must have been born under a lucky star, for though it is said that he fights like a tiger, he has never been wounded. Is that true? Do you know him? What kind of a looking man is he? He must be terribly ferocious-looking, and people say he dresses very strangely. You, being a sailor, have probably seen him."

"Never," dryly replied the stranger, who did not

appear to share the innkeeper's admiration for the privateer.

Then he added:

"Show me to my room, and when the person who inquires for Master Dupont comes, bring him to me at once. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly, monsieur."

"And as soon as the person comes you are to serve breakfast."

"Very well, monsieur. I will show you to your room now."

"Is it a front room?"

"Yes, monsieur, with two large windows."

"I want some of your best wine, remember."

"Give yourself no uneasiness; you will be perfectly satisfied, I think," replied the innkeeper.

About a quarter of an hour afterward a second guest entered the inn. This man also wore a heavy pea-jacket, and his swarthy skin, jet-black hair, and hard, almost repulsive features gave him a decidedly sinister appearance. After casting a quick glance around, the newcomer said, in bad French, and with an Italian accent, for he was a native of the island of Malta:

"Is there a man named Dupont here?"

"Yes, monsieur, and I will take you to his room at once if you will follow me."

Subsequently, when the host had placed breakfast on the table, he received orders to retire and not return until he was summoned.

As soon as the two strangers found themselves alone together, the Maltese, striking the table a terrible blow with his clenched fist, exclaimed in English:

"That dog of a smuggler has backed out; all is lost!"

"What are you saying?"

The truth, as surely as I would take delight in burying this knife in the heart of the coward who betrayed us," and as he spoke he plunged his knife into the table.

"Damnation!" exclaimed the Englishman, startled out of his usual phlegm, "and the captain is to pass through the town about nightfall."

"Are you sure?"

"This morning just as I was leaving Dieppe our friend told me that the captain had ordered post-horses for four o'clock this afternoon, so he will arrive here between five and six."

"*Mille tonnerres!* everything seemed to favour our plans, and but for this miserable smuggler —"

"Pietri, the case is not so desperate as you think, perhaps, after all. At all events this violence will avail nothing, so let us talk the matter over calmly."

"Calmly, when rage fairly blinds me!"

"A blind man can not see his road."

"If you can be calm, you do not hate this man as I do."

"I do not?"

It is impossible to give the reader any adequate conception of the tone in which the Englishman uttered these words.

After a pause, he resumed, in a tone of concentrated hatred:

"I must hate him worse than you hate him, Pietri, as I do not wish to kill him."

"A dead serpent bites no more."

"Yes, but a dead serpent suffers no more, and I want to see this man suffer a thousand worse tortures than death. He must atone for the evil he has done my country; he must atone for the bloody victories which have demoralised our cruisers; he must atone for the recent insult offered to me. D—n him! Am I such an insignificant enemy that I can be released simply upon parole after the combat that cost us so much treasure and blood, but without one drop of his being shed, for he really seems to be invulnerable as they say. As surely as there is a hell my disgrace and England's shall be avenged."

"And yet a moment ago Captain Russell was reproaching me for the foolish violence of my words," retorted the Maltese, with a sardonic smile.

"You are right," replied Russell, controlling himself. "Such an outburst is foolish in the extreme. Besides, we must not despair. What passed between you and the smuggler?"

"Leaving Dieppe in a fishing-smack last night, I reached Hosey this morning and made my way to the man's hut, which stands some distance farther down the beach. 'Is your name Bezelek?' I asked. 'Yes.' 'I was sent here by Master Keller.' 'What is the countersign?' '*Passe-partout.*' 'Good! I have been expecting you. My boat is at your service. It is high tide at ten o'clock to-night, and the wind, if it doesn't change, will take you to England before morning.' 'Master Keller told you what is to be done?' 'Yes, some one is to be transported to England, willy-nilly, but safe and sound, understand. I am a smuggler, but no murderer. So bring your passenger along to-night and I promise you he shall be in England before sunrise.' 'Did Keller tell you that I must have four or five of your most determined men at my disposal?' 'What for?' 'To assist me in capturing the man on the highway a few miles from here.' 'Keller told me nothing of the kind, and you need not expect me or my men to mix ourselves up in any such affair. Bring your man here, and I will see that he is put aboard my boat. That is all. If he resists, I can suppose he is drunk, and that it is for his good we are putting him aboard, but to assist in the abduction of a man on the public highway is a very different thing, and I have no notion of doing anything of the kind.' That was what he said, and he stuck to it. I soon discovered there wasn't the slightest chance of moving him, for neither threats nor bribes had the slightest effect upon him."

"This is too bad! too bad!"

"So you see, Russell, we shall have to resort to other means, for even if the postilion remains neutral, it would be impossible for us two to do the job without assistance, especially as the captain has a devoted and intrepid companion in the shape of his head gunner, who never leaves him either on land or sea, so if we resort to force we shall only make fools of ourselves, it seems to me."

"That is true," muttered the Englishman, gloomily.

"So as there is no chance of succeeding by violence we shall have to resort to stratagem," continued the Maltese.

"Explain."

"On my way here I noticed that about two miles from the town, at a place marked by a stone cross, there is a steep hill, followed by a no less abrupt descent."

"Well, what of it?"

"We will lie in wait for the carriage about half-way up the hill. It will be moving very slowly as the hill is so steep, and we will suddenly rush out from our hiding-place, and, pretending that we are sailors on our way back to our vessel, ask the captain for aid, you at one door and I at the other. Both of us will have our pistols loaded and our knives in our belts and —"

"Never!" exclaimed Russell, "I am no assassin nor do I desire this man's death. The murder would be a disgrace to England; besides, it would only half avenge me. No, what I want is to enjoy this indomitable man's rage and humiliation when, as our prisoner, he is exposed to the abuse and derision and insults of the multitudes whom his name has so often terrified. No caged tiger ever roared and chafed against confinement more wildly and yet more impotently than he will. Imprisonment in the hulks will be a thousand times more terrible than death to such a man. But the obstinacy of this smuggler ruins all my plans. As they have become impossibilities, what shall we do?"

"Adopt mine," urged the Maltese. "Death may be

less cruel than vengeance, but it is much more certain; besides, vengeance is impossible now, but we hold this man's life in our hands. Besides, what difference does it really make about the means we employ so long as England is delivered from one of her most dangerous enemies?"

"Say no more."

"But think of the vessels this man has captured and burned, and of the bloody combats from which he has emerged safe and sound and victorious, too, in spite of greatly inferior numbers!"

"Be silent, I tell you."

"Think of the terror his name inspires in English sailors — the best seamen in the world; haven't you even heard them say in their superstitious fear that the success of this invincible and invulnerable man seems to indicate the swift decadence of England's maritime supremacy, and that the sea is to have its Napoleon as well as the land? Think what a disastrous effect such a superstition will have if the time ever comes when England makes an attempt to overthrow Bonaparte and crush France."

"But a murder, — a cowardly assassination!"

"An assassination? No, England and France are at war, and to take advantage of an ambuscade to surprise and destroy an enemy is one of the recognised laws of warfare."

Russell made no reply, but sat with his head bowed upon his breast for some time apparently absorbed in thought.

The Maltese seemed to be equally absorbed in thought. As they sat there in silence, the sound of carriage wheels was heard in the distance, followed by the cracking of the postilion's whip and the ring of horses' hoofs.

"Five o'clock! It must be he!" exclaimed the Englishman as he glanced at his watch.

Both men darted to the window and saw a dusty cabriolet drawn by two horses stop in front of the post-house on the other side of the street, opposite the inn, and in another instant the Englishman turned livid with rage and cast a look of implacable hatred on the unsuspecting traveller.

"It is he! It is really he!"

"And he is alone," added the Maltese, quickly.

"He is entering this very inn."

"Everything favours us. He must have left his friend and companion in Dieppe. He is alone; there are two of us!"

"Can we still count upon the smuggler's boat and assistance to-night?" suddenly inquired Russell. A new idea seemed to have struck him. A slight flush suffused his pale, cold face, and a spark of diabolical joy glittered in his eye, as he asked the question.

"Yes; for desiring to reserve a means of flight in case of need, I told him he might expect us."

"Courage, then," exclaimed Russell, ringing the bell, violently.

"What do you mean?" inquired the Maltese. "What do you intend to do?"

"You shall know, presently. Hush! here comes somebody."

It was the innkeeper that had answered the summons.

"The breakfast was excellent, my friend," said Russell. "How much do I owe you?"

"Six francs, including the room."

"Here it is, and a present for the waiter, besides."

"You are very honest, monsieur. I hope to be honoured with your patronage again."

"You certainly will be. But tell me, I thought I heard post-horses just now. Has there been another arrival?"

"Yes, monsieur, another gentleman just came. I put him in the blue room overlooking the garden."

"He is one of your old patrons, probably, as a person who has been here once is sure to come back."

"Monsieur is very kind, I am sure, but it is the first time this traveller has ever stopped here."

"Is he travelling in style with a retinue of servants and all that, and is he going to remain long?"

"No, monsieur, only long enough to take a slight lunch. This is no rich nobleman. He is travelling alone, and looks and acts like a well-to-do tradesman. He hums tunes and drums upon the window-panes, and seems as gay as a peacock. He must be a very pleasant man."

"You seem to be a great physiognomist, mine host," responded the Englishman, with a sarcastic smile.

Then making a sign to his companion, he rose, remarking to the innkeeper as he did so:

"*Au revoir*, my friend. We are going to take a stroll around the town, and then return to Dieppe."

"If you would like to wait for the Paris diligence, it will pass through the town about eight o'clock this evening."

"Thanks, but though we are sailors, we are good walkers, and it is such a fine evening I think we won't wait for it."

CHAPTER VI.

A CUNNING SCHEME.

AFTER leaving the inn, the two strangers took themselves off for a quarter of an hour to decide upon their plans, then strolled like a couple of inquisitive idlers toward the post-station in front of which the traveller's carriage stood, nearly ready for departure, as the postilion was already putting fresh horses to it.

Captain Russell and his companion approached the vehicle, and, seating themselves upon one of the benches in front of the post-house, pretended to be examining the animals that were being harnessed, with a knowing eye.

"You have a horse there that seems to be as willing as he is handsome," Russell remarked to the postilion, after a few minutes' scrutiny.

"And he is as good as he looks, my friend," replied the postilion, pleased by the well-deserved praise bestowed upon his steed, "so I call him the Friar, and he is worthy of his name."

"He's a fine animal, there's no doubt of that. What a broad chest he has, and what powerful withers and flanks!"

"And what a beautiful head he has!" chimed in Pietri. "It is as delicate and intelligent as that of any Arabian steed."

"It is evident that you are both good judges of horse flesh, gentlemen, so you won't doubt my word when I

tell you that I can get over a mile or two of ground in the twinkling of an eye with the Friar and Sans-Culotte, as I call his mate."

"Yes, it must be a real pleasure to have a horse like that between one's legs, my worthy fellow. Though I'm a sailor, I've ridden horseback a good deal, but I never had the good fortune to bestride an animal like that."

"I can very readily believe that, monsieur; but this I know, you will never bestride a finer one."

"And it is too bad!"

"I don't see what you are going to do about it."

"Would you like to make forty francs, my friend?" inquired the Englishman, after a brief silence.

"Forty francs, I?" exclaimed the astonished postilion.

"Yes."

"But how the devil could I?"

"In the easiest way imaginable."

"Let me hear it."

Just as the Englishman was about to make known his proposition, a waiter from the inn crossed the street to tell the postilion that he need not be in a hurry, for the traveller would not be ready for some time.

"What is he doing? and why did he order his horses so long ahead, then?"

"I don't know anything about that, but I do know he's a queer one. What do you think he dined on? He drank milk instead of wine, and ate some poached eggs and panada."

"Panada? Well, he must be a queer one!" said Jean Pierre, scornfully. Then turning to Russell, "Come, friend, what were you going to tell me a few minutes ago about —"

"Step into the stable-yard, my good fellow, I want to say a few words to you."

"I can't leave the Friar; he would be sure to cut up some caper. He's always fussing with Sans-Culotte. Whoa, you rascal! See, he's beginning his antics now.

Whoa, there! if you break away, you brigand, I'll give you a beating you'll remember."

"Listen, then," said the Englishman, whispering a few words in the postilion's ear.

"What a funny idea!" exclaimed that young man, laughing.

"Will you accept my offer?"

"Really —"

"If you will, here are twenty francs. You shall have the rest when you get to the appointed place. After all, what risk do you run? There is no harm in it."

"None in the world, but it is such a funny idea. It isn't the first time I've heard of the like, though. What do you think I saw in Dieppe the other day? Those privateersmen — my! how they make their money fly! — did the queerest things! I saw some of them offer twenty-five napoleons to an old sacristan to dress himself up like a woman in a furbelowed dress and a plumed hat and then drive about the town in a cab with them."

"What else could you expect, my good fellow? Sailors are on shore too seldom not to amuse themselves according to their fancy, provided it doesn't injure anybody. You agree, don't you?"

"Oh, well, it isn't worth while to have any scruples when one has to deal with a passenger who eats panada and doesn't drink wine, I admit, so —"

"So here are twenty francs," added Russell, slipping a gold piece into the postilion's hand. "You shall have as much more presently."

"All right, but make haste, for the place is a good league from here. Take the first road to the left."

A moment afterward the two strangers had disappeared.

About a quarter of an hour afterward, while the postilion was doing his best to restrain the gambols of

the Friar and his mate, the proprietor of the Imperial Eagle appeared in the doorway and cried:

"Mount, my boy, mount! Here comes the gentleman!"

"The devil!" muttered Jean Pierre, climbing slowly into the saddle. "My milk-drinker is in a dreadful hurry all of a sudden. I sha'n't be able to get my horses there fast enough, now, I suppose."

As he spoke, he guided his horses up to the door of the inn, and the traveller stepped into the vehicle. The landlord bowed respectfully to his patron, and as he closed the carriage door called out to the postilion:

"Drive along, Jean Pierre, monsieur is in a hurry."

"You shall just fly along, monsieur," replied Jean Pierre, cracking his whip noisily.

They traversed the town at a gallop and soon reached the highway, but they had gone only a couple of hundred yards when the postilion checked his horses abruptly, and, turning in his saddle, seemed to be waiting for something.

The traveller, surprised at this sudden stop, lowered one of the windows, and asked:

"Well, what's the matter?"

"What's the matter?"

"Yes."

"I've no idea, I'm sure."

"You don't know?"

"I'm sure I don't."

"But why did you stop?"

"Because you called to me to stop."

"I did?"

"Yes, and so I stopped."

"You are mistaken, I didn't call you."

"Yes, you did, monsieur."

"But I tell you I didn't. So go on, and try to make up for the time you have lost."

"You needn't worry about that. I'll drive like mad

now. I don't mean there shall be a piece of the carriage left when we get to the next station."

And he again started his horses off at a gallop. But at the end of two hundred yards there was another sudden pause.

"What's the matter now?" demanded the traveller. "Is anything the matter with your harness?" he reiterated, seeing the postilion busying himself with his saddle-girth, uttering the most frightful oaths all the while.

There was no reply but another long string of furious imprecations, however.

"Is your horse disabled?"

Another string of oaths was the only answer.

"At least tell me what is the matter, my boy."

"Oh, never mind, monsieur, I've fixed everything all right now."

"Well, try to keep it all right, then."

"We shall fly along the road like birds, now, never fear, bourgeois," responded the youth, springing into the saddle and cracking his whip furiously.

The shades of night were falling, a few stars were already visible in the western horizon, but in the distance one could still dimly discern, by reason of the chalky character of the soil, a steep hill bordered by tall elm-trees.

The post-chaise flew swiftly along for about ten minutes, then the pace slackened, a trot succeeded the gallop, a walk succeeded the trot, and then the vehicle stopped short again.

This time Jean Pierre jumped down and examined one of the Friar's feet with great apparent solicitude.

"*Mille tonnerres!* one of my horses has gone lame!" he cried.

"Gone lame?" repeated the traveller, with unruffled calmness, though these numerous delays were certainly enough to try the patience of a saint. "Gone lame, did you say?"

"Yes, frightfully lame," answered Jean Pierre, still holding up the horse's foot.

"But how did he happen to go lame so suddenly, my boy?"

"The devil take me if I know."

"Shall we have to stay here?"

"No, bourgeois, there's no danger of that. If I could only see what has made the horse go lame, but it is getting so dark —"

"Yes, and you must be sure not to forget to light the lanterns at our next stopping-place."

"Ah! I can feel what it is with my finger. There is a stone crowded in between the shoe and the frog. If I can only loosen it everything will be all right again."

"Try then, my boy, for really this is getting very tiresome," replied the still calm voice of the traveller.

Inwardly chuckling over the success of his ruse, the postilion continued to loudly curse the stone he was ostensibly endeavouring to remove, until he thought the two strangers must have had plenty of time to reach the appointed spot, after which he uttered a cry of triumph. "The accursed stone is out at last!" he exclaimed. "Now we shall just fly along again."

And again the vehicle started off at a rapid trot. Though night had really come now, thanks to the clearness of the air and the innumerable stars, it was not very dark. On reaching the foot of the hill the postilion stopped his panting horses, and, after springing to the ground, approached the carriage door, and said:

"This is such a steep hill, bourgeois, that I always walk up to make it easier for my horses."

"Very well, my boy," replied the occupant of the vehicle, tranquilly.

The postilion walked along beside his horses for a few seconds, then gradually slackened his pace, thus allowing them to get a short distance ahead of him. Just then, Russell and Pietri emerged from behind a

clump of bushes on the roadside, and approached the postilion. The latter, as he walked along, had removed his braided jacket, red waistcoat, and topboots. The Englishman, who had likewise divested himself of his outer apparel, slipped on the jacket, plunged his feet into the high boots, and seized the hat, after which the postilion, smiling at what he considered an excellent joke, handed his whip to Russell, remarking:

"It is too dark for the gentleman to see anything, so when you mount my horse I'll get up on the rack behind, with your companion."

"Yes, and when we reach the next station I will get down, and you can put on your own clothes again, and I mine. And now here is the twenty francs I promised you."

And slipping a gold piece in Jean Pierre's hand, Russell quickened his pace, and, overtaking the horses about twenty yards from the top of the hill, began to walk along beside them.

It was now too dark for the traveller to perceive the substitution that had just been effected, but as the carriage reached the summit of the hill the occupant leaned out and said to the supposed postilion:

"Don't forget to put on the brake, my lad."

"I am going to do that now," answered the pretended postilion, in a disguised voice.

Then slipping behind the vehicle, he said in a low tone to the Maltese and to Jean Pierre:

"Get up behind and hold on tight. I'm going to put on the brake."

The two men obeyed, while Russell rattled the chain of the brake, as if he were applying it to the wheel, but this was really only a pretence on his part; then vaulting into the saddle, he dug his spurs into his horse's flanks, and sent the carriage flying down the hill with frightful rapidity.

"Good God! we are lost, and the milk drinker in the

bargain," exclaimed Jean Pierre hearing the chain of the brake dragging along on the ground. "Your friend failed to put the brake on, after all."

The Maltese, instead of answering the postilion, struck him such a violent blow on the head with the butt end of a pistol that Jean Pierre let go his hold on the rack and fell to the ground, while the carriage flew down the hill enveloped in a cloud of dust.

CHAPTER VII.

HOME PLEASURES.

SEVERAL days have passed since the traveller fell into the trap Captain Russell and his companion had set for him, and we must beg the reader to accompany us to a pretty cottage in the little village of Lionville, about four miles from Havre.

A bracing and salubrious climate, a country which is at the same time fertile and picturesque, fine trees, luxuriant turf, and a superb view of the ocean, make Lionville a veritable paradise to persons who love peace and quiet and opportunities for solitary meditation.

At that time, as in many other towns and villages, great and small, the absence of young men was particularly noticeable, the last wars of the Empire having summoned to the defence of the flag nearly all who were young and able-bodied, until a young man of twenty-five who had remained a civilian, unless he was a hunchback, or crippled, was almost as rare a phenomenon as the phœnix or a white crow.

Lionville possessed one of these rarities in the shape of a handsome young man not over twenty-four years of age, but we must make haste to say that he did not seem in the least inclined to take advantage of his position, for he led a very retired life, quite as much from preference as from any other reason.

This young man was one of the inmates of the pleasant, cheerful home to which we have already alluded, and several days after the traveller had been

victimised by the pretended postilion a middle-aged woman, a young girl, and this young man (the phœnix referred to) were assembled one evening in a pretty, comfortably furnished drawing-room. A good fire was blazing on the hearth, for the evenings were still cool, and a shaded lamp diffused a soft light through the apartment, while the tea-kettle, standing in front of the fire, bubbled softly.

A close observer would perhaps have noticed that most of the ornaments and articles of luxury were of English origin, in spite of the stern prohibition against the importation of English goods which then prevailed on the continent. The same might be said of the handsome silver tea-service, no two pieces of which were alike, however, a ducal coronet surmounting the massive hot-water urn and a knight's crest adorning the teapot, while an unpretending initial was engraved upon the sugar-bowl, though it was none the less brilliant on that account.

The middle-aged woman had a frank, intelligent, cheerful face. She was at least forty-two years old, but her hair was still black, her complexion fresh, her teeth white, and her eyes bright; in short, this worthy dame still attracted plenty of admiring glances when, arrayed in a handsome bonnet of English lace, a gown of English tissue, and a Paisley shawl of the finest texture, she accompanied her youthful charge to the village church.

The young girl in question was seventeen, tall, slender, extremely delicate in appearance, and endowed or rather afflicted with an extremely nervous and impressionable temperament. This extreme sensibility or susceptibility was at least partially due to, or perhaps we should say, had been greatly aggravated by a terrible event which occurred many years before, and which had had the effect of rendering her excessively timid. It would be difficult to find a more pleasing and attractive face than hers, however, and when, yielding to the uncontrollable

fear which the most trivial incident sometimes excited, she arched her slender neck, and listened pantingly, breathlessly, with her graceful attitude and large wondering, frightened eyes, she reminded one of a startled gazelle. By reason of this nervous and extremely sensitive temperament, probably, the young girl had not the brilliant colouring of sturdy health, but was usually very pale, though every passing emotion brought a delicate rose tint to her cheek, and then her charming face, framed in a wealth of bright chestnut hair, seemed radiant with the glowing beauty of youth. True, with a more vivid colouring and fuller contour, she might have been much more attractive to many persons, but much of the charm of her expressive features and delicate loveliness would have been lost.

The last of the three persons assembled in the cosy parlour was the phœnix to whom allusion has been made, that is to say, a handsome young man who had not been summoned to the defence of the flag.

This phœnix was twenty-five years old, of medium height, slender, but admirably formed, with a frank expression and regular features, though a tinge of slightly deprecating embarrassment was apparent both in his face and manner, the result of the infirmity which had exempted him from military service. In short, the young man's sight was very poor, so poor, indeed, that he could scarcely see to move about; besides, by reason of some organic peculiarity, he could derive no assistance from glasses, and though his large brown eyes were clear and well-shaped, there was something vague and uncertain in their gaze, and sometimes when the poor myope, after having turned quickly, as if to look at you, remembered, alas! with bitter sadness, that three yards from him every person and object became unrecognisable, the expression of his face was almost heartrending.

Still, it must be admitted that the consequences of

the young man's infirmity were sometimes so amusing as to excite mirth rather than compassion; and it is needless to say that the middle-aged lady was keenly alive to all that was ludicrous in her youthful relative's blunders — for the relationship existing between them was that of nephew and aunt, — while the young girl, on the contrary, seemed to sympathise deeply with the oftentimes painful position of the half-blind man.

The young girl was embroidering, and her governess or housekeeper knitting, while the young man, with the last issue of the *Journal of the Empire* held close to his eyes, was reading the latest news aloud, and informing his readers of the Duc de Reggio's departure to take command of the army.

The housekeeper, hearing a brisk bubbling sound accompanied with several little jets of steam from the kettle, said to her nephew:

"The water is boiling, Onésime. Pour some into the urn, but pray be careful."

Onésime laid his paper on the table, rose, and started toward the hearth with dire misgivings which were more than justified. He knew, alas! that his path was full of snares and pitfalls, for there was an armchair standing on his left to be avoided, then a small round table to the right of him, and this Scylla and Charybdis avoided, he had to step over a small footstool near the hearth before he could seize the boiling kettle. Consequently, one can easily understand the extreme prudence with which Onésime started on his mission. One outstretched hand warning him of the close proximity of the armchair on his left, he avoided that obstacle, but he was almost on the point of running against the table before his other hand discovered danger of a second shipwreck, and he was inwardly rejoicing at having reached the fireplace without mishap, when he stumbled over the footstool. In his efforts to regain his equilibrium he took a step or two backwards, and,

coming in violent contact with the table, overturned it with a loud crash.

For several minutes the young girl had been absorbed in a profound reverie. Rudely awakened from it by the noise made by the falling table, ignorant of the cause of the commotion, and unable to overcome her fear, she uttered a cry of terror and sank back in her chair, trembling like a leaf.

"Don't be frightened, my dear," cried the housekeeper. "It is another of Onésime's escapades, that is all. Calm yourself, my child."

The young girl, on discovering the cause of the commotion, deeply regretted having increased her unfortunate friend's embarrassment, so, striving to overcome the nervous trembling that had seized her, she said:

"Forgive me, my dear friend. How silly I am, but you know I never seem to be able to conquer this absurd nervousness."

"Poor child, it is no fault of yours! Are you not the one who suffers most from it? Surely there is no necessity for apologising to us, especially as but for my nephew's awkwardness —"

"No, no, I am the culprit," interrupted the young girl. "To be so childish at my age is disgraceful."

The unfortunate young man, distressed beyond measure at his mishap, stammered a few incoherent words of apology, then set the table on its feet again, shoved the footstool aside, and, seizing the teakettle, started to pour the water into the urn, when his aunt exclaimed:

"Don't attempt that, for Heaven's sake! You are so awkward, you will be sure to make a mess of it."

Onésime, deeply mortified and anxious to atone for his former blunder, persisted, nevertheless, and, lifting the cover of the urn, began to pour the water from the kettle with his right hand, while his left rested on the edge of the table. But unfortunately his eyes played him false as usual, and he began pouring the contents

of the teakettle down one side of the urn, instead of into the opening, covering his left hand with boiling water and burning it frightfully.

He manifested a truly heroic stoicism, however. But for the slight start caused by the sudden and intense suffering, he gave no sign, and, conscious now of the mistake he had made, finally managed to fill the urn, after which he said, gently:

"The urn is filled, aunt. Shall I make the tea? Mademoiselle will take a cup, perhaps."

"What! you have actually filled the urn without any fresh catastrophe? You really ought to have a leather medal, my dear," laughed his aunt.

"Don't pay any attention to what she says, M. Onésime," interposed the young girl. "Your aunt takes such delight in teasing you that I feel it my duty to come to your assistance. And now will you be kind enough to give me a cup of tea?"

"No, no, don't you dare to think of such a thing!" exclaimed the housekeeper, laughing. "You will be sure to break one of these pretty pink and white cups monsieur brought us the last time he came home."

But Onésime gave the lie to his aunt's gloomy prognostications, by bringing the cup of tea to the young girl without spilling a drop, and was rewarded by a gentle "Thank you, M. Onésime," accompanied with her sweetest smile. But the sad, almost imploring expression in the young man's eyes, as he turned toward her, touched her deeply.

"Alas!" she said to herself, "he does not even see that I am smiling at him. He always seems to be asking you to have patience with his infirmity."

This thought grieved her so much that the older woman noticed the fact, and asked:

"What is the matter, my child? You look sad."

Hearing his aunt's words, Onésime turned anxiously to the young girl, as if trying to read the expression of

her face, while she, embarrassed by the housekeeper's remark, answered:

"You are mistaken, I am not in the least sad; but just now when you spoke of my father it reminded me that he ought to have reached home several days ago."

"Surely you are not going to torment yourself about that, my child. Is this the first time your father has failed to arrive at the appointed time?"

"It worries me, nevertheless."

"Dear me! There isn't the slightest doubt that business has detained him. Do you suppose that a man who acts as the business agent of a number of big factories can tell the exact hour at which he will be able to return home? An opportunity to make a large sale sometimes presents itself just as he is about to start, and he is obliged to remain. Only a couple of months ago, just before he went away, he said to me: 'I am determined my daughter shall be rich. A couple more trips like the last, and I will never leave the dear child again.'"

"Heaven grant that time may soon come," sighed the girl. "I should be tranquil and happy if my kind and loving father were always with me. You are tormented by so many fears when one you love is absent from you."

"Fears! fears about what, I should like to know! What risk can a quiet merchant like monsieur run? A merchant who doesn't meddle with other people's affairs, but travels about from town to town in a post-chaise, to sell his goods. What risk does a man like that run? Besides, he travels only in the daytime, and always has his clerk with him, and you know he would go through fire and water for your father, though he really does seem to be the most unfortunate of mortals."

"That is true. Poor man! some accident seems to befall him every time he travels with my father."

"Yes, and why? Simply because he is the most

meddlesome old creature that ever lived, and the awkwardest. Still, that doesn't prevent him from being a great protection to monsieur if any one should attempt to molest him. So what have you to fear, my child?"

"Nothing."

"Think how you would feel if you had a father in the army as so many girls have."

"I could never stand such a terrible strain as that. Why, to be always thinking that my father was exposed to danger, to death, — why, the mere idea of such a thing is appalling."

"Yes, my poor child, the mere idea of such a thing makes you as pale as a ghost, and sets you to trembling like a leaf. It does not surprise me, though, for I know how devoted you are to your father. But drive these dreadful thoughts from your mind, and, by the way, suppose Onésime finishes reading the paper to us."

"Certainly, if M. Onésime is not too tired."

"No, mademoiselle," replied the young man, making almost superhuman efforts to conceal his suffering, which was becoming more and more intolerable.

And getting the paper as close to his eyes as possible, he was preparing to resume the reading, when he remarked:

"I think this is an article which is likely to interest mademoiselle."

"What is it about?"

"It describes the exploits of that famous Dieppe privateer, of whom everybody is talking."

"I fear the article will be too exciting for you to-day, my dear, you seem to be so nervous," remarked the housekeeper.

"Is it such a very blood-curdling story, M. Onésime?" inquired the girl, smiling.

"I think not, mademoiselle, judging from the title. The article is headed: 'Remarkable Escape of the Brave

Captain l'Endurci, Who Was Abducted from French Soil by English Emissaries.' "

"It must be very interesting. Pray read it, monsieur."

So the young man at once began to read the following account of the brave captain's escape.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CAPTAIN'S NARRATIVE.

"ALL France is familiar with the name and heroic valour of Captain l'Endurci, commander of the privateer *Hell-hound*, as well as the large number of prizes which the gallant captain has recently captured from the English.

"Only a few days ago Captain l'Endurci returned to Dieppe, with a large three-master belonging to the East India Company, and armed with thirty guns, in tow, while the *Hell-hound* can boast of only sixteen. This three-master, which was convoying several merchant vessels loaded with wheat, had, together with her convoy, been captured by the intrepid captain, after a desperate fight of three hours, in which nearly or quite one-half of the French crew had been killed or wounded.

"The gallant captain's entrance into the port of Dieppe was a veritable triumph. The entire population of the town assembled upon the piers, and when the brig, black with powder and riddled with shot, sailed slowly in with her prizes, shouts of the wildest enthusiasm rent the air, but the brave captain's triumph became an ovation when the people learned that the vessels which the three-master was convoying were laden with wheat. At a time when grain is so appallingly scarce in France, such a capture is a national benefaction, and when the people discovered that Captain l'Endurci, being aware of the speedy arrival of these vessels, had spent several days

lying in wait for them, allowing richer and less dangerous prizes to pass unmolested, all Dieppe went wild."

"How grand!" exclaimed the housekeeper, enthusiastically. "Ah, I would give ten years of my life to be the mother or sister of such a hero."

"And I, my friend, deem myself a thousand times more fortunate in being the daughter of an honest merchant, instead of having some bloodthirsty hero for a father," remarked Sabine.

"What a strange child you are! Wouldn't you feel proud to be able to say: 'That famous man is my father?'"

"Not by any means. If he were absent, I should be always trembling to think of the danger he might be in; if he were with me, I should always be imagining I saw blood on his hands."

"Such ideas seem very strange to me, for I love heroes, myself," said the older woman, gaily. "But go on, Onésime, I am anxious to hear how this valiant captain could have been kidnapped on French soil." Then, noticing that her nephew was unusually pale, and that big drops of perspiration were standing on his brow, she asked:

"What is the matter, Onésime? You seem to be suffering."

"No, indeed, aunt," replied the young man, enraged at himself for not being able to conceal the agony his burn was causing him. "Now listen to the rest of the story.

"Captain l'Endurci, after a three day's sojourn in Dieppe, started for Paris, unfortunately leaving his head gunner, one of his oldest comrades-in-arms, who was seriously wounded in the last engagement, in Dieppe to attend to some business matters.

"It was between the second and the third post-stations on his route that this audacious attack was made upon the captain, evidently by English emissaries

who had been lying in wait for him. It seems that these emissaries had taken advantage of the postilion's credulity to persuade him to allow one of them to take his place and drive the vehicle for awhile. This change of drivers was made while ascending a steep hill, where the progress of the vehicle was necessarily slow, but the Englishman was scarcely in the saddle before he started the horses off at a frightful pace, while the postilion was hurled half-dead upon the ground by the other Englishman, who was clinging to the back of the post-chaise.

"The captain astonished at the terrific speed with which the horses were tearing down the steep descent, thought that the postilion had neglected to put on the brake, and had lost all control of the horses; but soon the rate of speed diminished perceptibly, though the vehicle continued to fly swiftly along.

"The night having become very dark, the captain could not see that the carriage, instead of following the main road, was going in an entirely different direction. Not having the slightest suspicion of this fact, and ignorant of the change of postilions, the captain rode on in this way about an hour and a half, and finally fell asleep.

"The sudden stopping of the carriage woke him, and supposing that he had reached the next relay station, and seeing two or three lanterns flitting about, he was unsuspectingly alighting from the vehicle, when several men suddenly rushed upon him, and, before he had time to offer the slightest resistance, he was securely bound and gagged, and dragged down to the beach on the outskirts of the little seaport town of Hosey, about fifteen miles from Dieppe, and known as the headquarters of a daring gang of smugglers. Here, the captain, who was unable to make the slightest movement or utter a word, was hustled aboard a fishing-smack, and a few minutes afterward, wind and tide both being favourable, the little vessel set sail for England.

"But Captain l'Endurci is not the man to tamely sub-

mit to defeat, as the following extract from that gentleman's letter to a friend in this city conclusively proves.

"He writes as follows:

"'When I found myself a prisoner in the hold, my rage at the cowardly trick which had been played upon me became ungovernable. I had been thrown upon a few pieces of old sail in the hold, with my legs securely bound together with a long piece of rope as big as my thumb, and with my hands tied behind my back. I tried by stooping to reach with my teeth the rope that bound my legs, but found it impossible. I knew by the motion of the boat that a strong wind was blowing, and that we were heading straight for the shores of England.

"'I knew the fate that awaited me there. A few words that had passed between my captors had enlightened me. Instead of killing me outright, they wanted to see me lead a life of torture in the hulks. One of them had even spoken of exposing me to the jeers and insults of the populace for several days.

"'The mere thought of such a thing nearly drove me mad, and in a paroxysm of fury I sank back on the old sails, foaming with rage. This ebullition over, anger as usual gave me new strength. My blood boiled in my veins, then, mounting to my brain, gave birth to a thousand projects, each one more audacious than the other, and I felt both my physical and mental vigour increased a hundredfold by this effervescent condition of all my vital powers.

"'I finally decided upon one of the plans that this paroxysm of rage had suggested to me. In any other frame of mind, it would have seemed utterly impracticable to me, and I believe it would have seemed so to any man who was not half frenzied by a spirit of anger,—anger, that dread and powerful divinity, as the Indian poet says.'"

For some time the young girl who sat listening had seemed to be a prey to a painful preoccupation;

several times she had started impatiently as if anxious to escape from some harrowing thought, and now suddenly interrupting the reading in spite of herself, as it were, she exclaimed:

"That man makes me shudder!"

"And why?" demanded the housekeeper. "This brave sailor seems to me as brave as a lion."

"But what a man of iron!" exclaimed the girl, more and more excitedly. "How violent he is! And to think that any person should dare to excuse and even glorify anger when it is so horrible — so unspeakably horrible!"

The housekeeper, without attaching much importance to the girl's protest, however, replied:

"Nonsense, my child! You say that anger is so terrible. That depends, — for if anger suggested to the captain a way and means of escape from these treacherous Englishmen, he is perfectly right to glorify it, and I, in his place — But good Heavens!" she exclaimed, seeing the girl turn alarmingly pale and close her eyes as if she were about to swoon. "Good Heavens, what is the matter with you? Your lips are quivering. You are crying. You do not answer me, — speak, what is the matter?"

But the words failed to reach the ears of the poor child. With her large eyes distended with terror and bewilderment, she indicated with a gesture some apparition which existed only in her disordered imagination, and murmured, wildly:

"The man in black! Oh, the man in black! There he is now! Don't you see him?"

"Calm yourself! Don't allow yourself to think any more about that, in Heaven's name. Don't you know how hurtful such thoughts are to you?"

"Oh, that man! He was equally terrible in his rage, when — It was years and years ago, and I was little more than a baby, but I can see him yet, in his strange, sombre costume of black and white like the livery of the

dead. It was night, and my father was absent from home when this man gained an entrance into our house, I know not how. I had never seen him before. He threatened my mother, who was holding me in her arms. 'At least spare my child!' she sobbed. I remember it well. But he only exclaimed, still advancing threateningly upon my mother, 'Don't you know that I am capable of anything in my anger?' And then he rushed out of the room. Oh, my mother, my mother dead, and I —"

The girl could say no more, for she was relapsing into one of the nervous spasms which this terrible recollection almost always caused, — this recollection of a deplorable occurrence from which her condition of morbid susceptibility seemed to have dated.

This crisis soon abated, thanks to the judicious attentions of the housekeeper, who was, alas! only too used to rendering them. When she was herself again, the young girl, whose character was a singular compound of weakness and firmness, thought with shame and regret of the lack of self-control she had displayed while this account of the corsair's escape was being read, an account which, strange to say, had an inexplicable fascination for her, inspiring her at the same time with horror and a sort of morbid curiosity; so, in spite of Onésime's entreaties, she insisted that he should continue the reading so unfortunately interrupted.

The housekeeper, noting this insistence, and fearing that any opposition might react very dangerously upon the girl's excitable nature just at this time, also requested Onésime to continue the account of Captain l'Endurci's escape.

CHAPTER IX.

CONCLUSION OF THE CAPTAIN'S NARRATIVE.

THE rest of the captain's letter read as follows:

"'In order to carry out my plan, the first thing I had to do was to free myself from my bonds. Being unable to reach them with my mouth so I could gnaw them in two with my teeth, I devised another means. By crawling about on my stomach and feeling around with my face — as I had no use of my hands — I finally succeeded in discovering a large iron hook, doubtless intended for holding the ballast in place. Approaching this hook, I leaned my back against it and began to rub the ropes that bound me across the iron and upon the sharp end of the hook. Two hours afterward I had worn the ropes sufficiently thin to be able to sever them by a powerful wrench, anger having endowed me with almost supernatural strength.

"'My hands free, the rest was only child's play.

"'I had my tinder-box, my pipe, a package of tobacco, and a long whaling-knife in my pocket. In the twinkling of an eye I had cut the ropes that bound my legs and started on a tour of inspection through the hold on my hands and knees, as it was too low to admit of my standing upright.

"'I could find nothing but some scraps of old sail and a few pieces of rope. The only means of egress was a square hatchway. The boards of which this was made had separated a little in one place, and I could see the moonlight through the opening. Placing my hands upon

my knees and making my body into a bow, I tried to force open the hatchway with my shoulders, but in vain. It was evidently secured — as it should have been — with two strong iron bars.

"'Taking some of the ends of rope, I cut them into small pieces, untwisted the strands, and in this way soon collected a small pile of tow. Afterward I cut some of the old canvas on which I had been lying into narrow strips and laid them on the little pile of tow, which I had placed directly under the hatchway; after which I emptied my little bag of tobacco on it to make it more combustible, and set fire to it, blowing it vigorously all the while.

"'The tow took fire, communicated it to the pieces of old sail, and an instant afterward the hold was filled with a dense smoke, part of which filtered through the opening in the hatchway, while I yelled "Fire!" with all my might. My cries and the strong smell of smoke that escaped through the hatchway frightened the men on deck. I heard a great commotion up there, the hatchway was raised almost immediately, and the thick cloud of smoke that poured out through the opening was so blinding that I was able to make my way through it, unseen, to the deck, with a single bound, knife in hand. I found myself face to face with a tall, swarthy man. I plunged my knife into his heart. He fell backward into the sea. Leaping for the axe which is always kept near the bitt, so the rigging can be quickly cut away if need be, I struck down another man; then, with a back stroke, nearly cut off the arm of a man who was rushing upon me, sabre in hand. All this occurred almost in the twinkling of an eye. Taking advantage of the sort of stupor that had seized the crew, and feeling much calmer after this explosion of long-suppressed rage, I could see better where I was, or take my bearings a little, as the saying is.

"'It was a magnificent moonlight night; a strong

breeze was blowing; an old, white-haired sailor was at the helm; a cabin-boy and three terrified sailors had taken refuge in the bow, separated from me by the open hatchway. The man I had struck down with the axe did not move; the one I had wounded was on his knees, holding his right arm in his left hand.

"'I still had three able-bodied men, a boy, and an old man to contend with, but they all seemed to be demoralised by my sudden attack.

"'Just then I caught sight of a pair of pistols near the rudder, and before either of the three sailors could make the slightest movement, I jumped for these weapons. In another moment my two bullets had struck down a man apiece. With me at the helm, and the old sailor and the boy to assist me, the boat could be handled with little or no difficulty, for the weather was superb, and we could not be more than fourteen or fifteen miles from the shores of France.

"'My situation thus promptly defined, I loaded my pistols again and advanced toward the three men, who were gradually recovering from their surprise.

"'"Go down into the hold, all three of you," I thundered. "If you don't, I'll shoot two of you, and hew down the other."

"'There was only the length of the hatchway — about four feet — between me and these men, so I could easily blow their brains out. They instantly jumped into the hold, where the small quantity of combustible material I had lighted was now nearly burned out. The wounded man, too, staggered down as best he could; I replaced the hatchway, securing it with the iron bars as before; then I walked to the stern of the boat.

"'"Give me the helm," I said to the old sailor; "you and the boy are to manage the sail, and manage it right, or I'll blow your brains out."

"'As I took the rudder out of his hand, he recoiled a step and exclaimed:

"'"It is Captain l'Endurci, as I live!"

"'"You know me, then?"

"'"Know you, captain! I made two voyages with you on the *Hell-hound*."

"'"And your name?"

"'"Simon from Dunkirk."

"'"I remember you now. So you intended to deliver me, your old captain, into the hands of the English, did you?"

"'"May I be shot if I suspected for a single instant that it was you, captain."

"'"So this smack belongs to you, I suppose."

"'"No, captain, to Bezelek."

"'"And where is he?"

"'"At the bottom of the sea. He was the man that you killed first and that fell overboard."

"'"But how does it happen that you consented to have a hand in my abduction?"

"'"Well, captain, we've been doing a little smuggling."

"'"That is very apparent."

"'"And night before last two men came to us, — that is one of them lying there now."

"' He pointed to the dead man in the bow as he spoke.

"'"Throw him into the sea," I said, curtly.

"'"And the other man?" I inquired, as soon as this order had been obeyed.

"'"He is down in the hold. He is the man you wounded in the arm."

"'"And how did these men induce you and Bezelek to become their accomplices?"

"'"They said: 'Bezelek, there are fifty guineas ready for you if you will consent to take a man we will bring to you to England. We do not intend to injure him in any way; but if he resists, you and your men will be expected to lend a hand in gagging and binding him, and placing him in the hold of your fishing-smack. You will be paid twenty-five guineas in advance, and

twenty-five more on your arrival at Folkestone.' As there seemed to be no great harm in the proceeding, the offer tempted Bezelek and he agreed to do what the men asked. But I swear that I had no idea it was you. If I had, I would never have had anything to do with the affair."

"'Four hours after I escaped from the hold we were within sight of the port of Mora, where I landed safe and sound.'

"Our readers will, we are sure, feel grateful to us," added the *Journal of the Empire*, "for having given them this extract from the brave privateer's letter. Thanks be to God, Captain l'Endurci, by his coolness and courage, succeeded in escaping this most infamous conspiracy against him. Let us hope that his name will long remain a terror to the enemies of France."

The article concluded, Onésime laid the paper on the table.

"What a wonderful man this corsair must be!" exclaimed the housekeeper, admiringly. "Alone, bound and gagged, he nevertheless found a way to escape his imminent danger."

"But what a quantity of blood he had to shed!" exclaimed the girl, shuddering. "And not a single word of regret or of pity for his victims. With what cruel indifference he speaks of the men he killed in cold blood; for thus taken by surprise, the poor creatures could offer no resistance."

"That is true," murmured Onésime.

But his aunt did not even hear him, for, turning to the girl, she exclaimed, warmly:

"It is very easy to talk, my child, but in such a position one certainly has a right —"

"Ah, yes, my dear, you are probably going to say that this man was the victim of the vilest treachery, — that he had an undoubted right to recover his liberty at any

cost, and that his ferocious disregard of the lives of others is what people call courage and heroism. All this is very possible. I am a poor judge, perhaps. I only tell you how it impresses me. This account of his exploits excites only horror and aversion in me."

"But a corsair is a corsair, my child. You certainly don't expect him to be a saint. Each man according to his trade."

"It is an executioner's business to behead people, aunt, but that makes his trade none the less horrible," exclaimed Onésime.

"Ah, I felt sure M. Onésime would feel as I do about it," said the girl, quickly.

"He? oh, yes, I don't doubt it! He is a regular sissy. When did you ever hear of his doing any fighting?"

"I admit that I am no hero, aunt," replied Onésime, smiling, "I don't doubt in the least that if I were a prisoner, and obliged to kill somebody to regain my liberty, I should remain a prisoner."

"Yours is the truest, noblest kind of courage, after all," responded the young girl, warmly, for her dislike of warriors in general was perhaps due in a great measure to the fact that Onésime, both by reason of his temperament and his infirmity, was never likely to be a man of that kind.

"Onésime courageous!" retorted the housekeeper. "You must be jesting!" Then, turning to her nephew, she cried: "Don't you see that mademoiselle is making fun of you, my poor boy? Oh, well, put my knitting on the table for me, my brave hero, and hand me my workbox without dropping it if you can."

The young man was consequently obliged to hold out both his hands in turn, one to present the work-box, the other to take the knitting, and as the light from the lamp fell full on the table, the pitiless aunt instantly discovered the terrible burn he had received.

"Good Heavens! what is the matter with your hand?" she exclaimed.

"Nothing of any consequence, aunt," he replied, hastily drawing back his hand, while the young girl, whose attention had been attracted by the housekeeper's exclamation, turned toward him anxiously.

But the aunt sprang up, and, seizing her nephew's hand in spite of his efforts to hide it, examined it carefully.

"It is frightfully burned, frightfully!" she cried. "Why, you must be suffering agony with it. It was just done. How did it happen? I know. It was when you poured the boiling water in the urn, and, for fear we would laugh at you, you endured the terrible pain without a word. You even had the courage to go on reading all this time just as if nothing had happened."

"Ah, I told you that he was brave," exclaimed the young girl. "His is the true courage, after all, — not the ferocious courage born of anger, that seeks only to destroy, but the courage of noble hearts who, for fear of alarming those whom they love, endure the most intense suffering without so much as a sign."

The girl's emotion repaid the young man a thousandfold for his suffering; he even had the happiness of seeing the touching expression of her features, too, this time, as she would insist upon assisting the housekeeper in dressing Onésime's hand.

This work had just been completed, and Onésime was regretting that he had only one burn, when the door of the little parlour was suddenly thrown open, and a servant rushed in, exclaiming:

"Dame Roberts, Dame Roberts, M. Segoffin has come!"

"And my father, — my father has come too, has he not?" exclaimed the girl, her face radiant with joy.

"No, mademoiselle, M. Segoffin says monsieur was

detained at the post-office by some letters, but that he will be here almost immediately."

The girl hastened out of the room to prepare to meet her father. As the door closed behind her, Dame Roberts turned to her nephew and said:

"Go up to your room now, Onésime. I will see you before I go to bed and tell you what M. Cloarek says in relation to you, for he must know why I took you into his house in his absence, though I know his kindness of heart well enough to feel sure that he will approve of what I have done."

So Onésime went up to his room oppressed by a vague uneasiness. He had scarcely left the parlour, when M. Segoffin entered it.

CHAPTER X.

SEGOFFIN'S DISSIMULATION.

It would be far from complimentary to the reader's penetration to suppose that he had not long since recognised in Onésime's defender Mlle. Cloarek, who lost her mother at the age of five years, in consequence of a nervous shock. We trust, too, that the reader's penetration has served him equally well in the case of Suzanne Roberts, Sabine's former nurse, and Madame Cloarek's confidential attendant and housekeeper, and likewise in the case of Captain l'Endurci and his brave head gunner.

Twelve years have elapsed since we last saw Segoffin, and he is little changed in appearance. He looks as much like a clown as ever, the only modifications which time, or rather events, have made in his grotesquely grave features being, first, a deep scar beginning at the left temple, and extending to the bottom of the cheek (a wound caused, as he affirmed, by an unfortunate fall upon a piece of broken glass).

Second, the recent loss of an eye, an unfortunate loss indicated by a large black patch, and caused, no doubt, by some similar mishap.

In spite of these rather grave injuries to his personal charms, M. Segoffin held his head as high as ever. A long white cravat, decorated with bright red polka dots, encircled his throat; his long redingote and knee-breeches were of the finest brown broadcloth, and his

black stockings were of silk. In his right hand, from which two fingers were missing, — two fingers carelessly lost, as he declared, from having been caught in a piece of machinery, — he carried a heavy cane, for he was quite lame now, in consequence of another accident, — at least, so he said.

On seeing Segoffin, Dame Roberts, in spite of the taunts with which she had pursued him for so many years, made no attempt to conceal her pleasure. In the delight his return caused her, she did not notice, at first, that Segoffin was all the while endeavouring to present only his profile, or as nearly a three-quarter view of his face as possible, to the object of his affections. The fact is, he wished to defer the explanation of the recent loss of his eye until the latest possible moment, but the lady, on going a little closer to him, noticed the disfiguring patch, and exclaimed:

"Good Heavens! what is the matter with your eye, Segoffin?"

"Which eye?"

"Why, your right eye."

"My right eye?"

"Yes. Why do you wear that big black patch over it?"

"I know."

"I should suppose that you did. As for me, I am afraid to guess what the matter is."

"Nonsense! guess away."

"You have lost an eye."

"There is no undoing that which is done."

"I declare, since monsieur went into business and took you for his clerk, there is many a soldier at the Invalides that isn't half as much battered up as you are. How on earth did you lose your eye?"

"The fact is, my sight has been failing for some time past, so I decided to put on spectacles. I went to purchase a pair. It was at Lyons. Ah, that rascally

optician!" exclaimed Segoffin, shaking his fist in a sort of retrospective rage.

"Calm yourself, Segoffin, and go on with your story."

"It was a splendid day, and the optician's shop stood in a blaze of sunlight on the Quai du Rhone, my dear, — in a blaze of sunlight, remember that."

"What difference does that make?"

"A vast amount of difference. I asked to try some spectacles. The scoundrel handed me a pair. I put them on my nose. Just at that moment loud screams were heard on the quay, and curiosity naturally caused me to run to the door."

"Of course."

"I ran to the door, I say, with the spectacles still on my nose, and I was looking all around, first to the right, then to the left, to see where the cries came from, when, happening to look up, I had very much the same feeling in my right eye as if the ball had been pierced by a red-hot iron."

"Good Heavens! what caused it?"

"One of the glasses in the pair which the optician had given me was of great magnifying power," replied Segoffin, "and when I looked up and the noonday sun shone full on my glasses, it converted the lens I speak of into a sort of burning-glass. My eye was burned out. You could positively hear it sizzle."

"Is it possible?" exclaimed Dame Roberts. "Did you really lose your eye in that way?"

"There is no undoing that which is done. But I will say this much, since I have had but one eye that one has been doing the work of two in the most remarkable manner. I have the eyes or rather the eye of fifteen, so to me you look as handsome, as handsome as if you were fifteen, my dear."

"I have no such juvenile eyes, my poor Segoffin, so I see you exactly as you are. I certainly regret the

accident exceedingly, and I truly hope this will be the last. Did monsieur have a satisfactory trip, and is he well?"

"Perfectly."

"And his fits of despondency when he thinks of madame's death?"

"He has them still. He shuts himself up alone for several hours, and when he appears again one can see that he has been weeping."

"And his disposition?"

"I am a regular firebrand in comparison."

"Then he evinces no more temper while travelling than he does here?"

"Not a bit more."

"And really when one remembers what monsieur was a dozen years ago, Segoffin!"

"There is as much difference as there is between day and night."

"That reminds me that Mlle. Sabine had another of her nervous attacks to-day, when something reminded her of her poor mother's death. How fortunate it is that she did not recognise monsieur in his Breton costume on that terrible night. The poor child still believes that it was a stranger who killed her mother."

"And she must never be allowed to suspect anything to the contrary."

"The complete change in monsieur's character makes that a comparatively easy matter."

"All the effect of a business career. When monsieur lost his position after poor madame's death, he said to himself: 'I have barely enough to support my daughter for a few years. I was evidently not intended for a judicial career. I have a taste for commerce, so I will try commerce.' And a very wise decision it has proved on his part, for he has not only accumulated a handsome fortune for his daughter, but transformed himself into the most lamb-like of men, and you have commerce to

thank for it all; for you must see for yourself that if a merchant went about beating his customers over the head and kicking them in the stomach, he wouldn't make many sales."

"You are and always will be the same exasperating creature, Segoffin!" exclaimed the housekeeper, impatiently. "Years of travel and business have made no change in you, mentally, understand; physically — it is different — "

"Hold, my ungrateful friend," said Segoffin, drawing a peculiarly shaped box from his pocket, and gallantly offering it to Suzanne. "This is the way in which I avenge myself for your abuse."

"What is it, Segoffin?"

"Some little tokens of friendly regard, for you know that in your secret heart you are really very fond of me."

But as the housekeeper opened the box, and unfolded a piece of paper in which the present was wrapped, she recoiled almost in terror.

"The paper is burnt at one end, and stained with blood at the other," she exclaimed, in dismay.

"Oh, yes," replied M. Cloarek's clerk, imperturbably, "it is a piece of — no matter what, that I used to light my candle with, and when I was wrapping the pin and the earrings up, I pricked my finger, — awkward as usual, you see."

The housekeeper took out a pair of enormous gold earrings, and a large gold pin ornamented with an anchor surmounted by a crown. We will here add, for the information of the reader, that in those days sailors in the royal navy of England still wore earrings, and fastened their woollen shirts with large gold or silver pins.

The housekeeper, more grateful for the kindly feeling than for the present itself, as she had no intention of dragging down her ears with these rings, fastened the pin in her dress.

"Really, you are too kind," she said. "These earings and this pin, especially, are in perfect taste, and as we live so near the sea the selection of a pin surmounted with an anchor is extremely appropriate. But here, M. Traveller," continued Suzanne, taking the red worsted comforter she had been knitting from the table, "you see you are not the only person who thinks of the absent."

"What, Suzanne, this comforter —"

"Is intended to keep you warm and comfortable in the winter."

"Ah, Suzanne, Suzanne, I shall never forget —"

But Segoffin's protestations of gratitude were, unfortunately, interrupted by the entrance of M. Cloarek and his daughter, arm in arm.

Yvon, who was now forty-two years of age, had changed very little in appearance. His hair was beginning to turn gray, and his skin was much sunburned; but he seemed to have gained in strength and vigour, his face was radiant, and his eyes were full of joyful tears.

"Come and let me take a good look at you, my child," he exclaimed, as he led his daughter to the light, and gazed at her with anxious tenderness, as if to satisfy himself that the health of this idolised child had improved since they parted; then, again enfolding her tenderly in his arms, he added:

"Ah, my beloved child, I can embrace you with a thankful heart, for I can see that you are much stronger than when I went away."

Then, addressing Dame Roberts for the first time, he said, with a friendly shake of the hand:

"I thank you with all my heart for your care and attentions, Suzanne, for I know how much you must have aided in Sabine's restoration to health."

And again turning to his daughter, Cloarek held out his arms.

"One more embrace, my child, one more!" he cried.

"Fathers and daughters as well as lovers like to be alone together after a long absence, my dear," Segoffin whispered to the housekeeper.

"You are right, Segoffin," replied Suzanne, starting toward the door.

"Ah, Suzanne, what a fine opportunity this would be for a tender interview if we wanted one," said M. Cloarek's clerk as he followed Dame Roberts into the adjoining room.

"Unfortunately love is blind, my poor Segoffin, and you are only half blind yet."

"That will not prevent you from becoming Madame Segoffin," responded our friend, in tones of the most profound conviction. "That which is to be, will be."

CHAPTER XI.

SABINE'S CONFESSION.

WHEN Yvon found himself alone with his daughter, he embraced her again even more passionately than before, as if Dame Roberts's presence had been rather a constraint upon the transports of paternal tenderness hitherto; then making Sabine seat herself on an ottoman near him and taking both her hands in his, he asked:

"And now, how have you been feeling during the last three months, months which have seemed well-nigh interminable to me?"

"Remarkably well, father."

"You look much stronger, I think. Besides —"

"What, my dear father?"

"It may be only a doting father's fancy, fathers have so many of them, but —"

"Let me hear what it is, father."

"It seems to me that you are even prettier than when I went away."

"That must be a doting father's fancy, especially as it implies that I was pretty before you left."

"And who ever doubted it, mademoiselle?"

"I, myself, in the first place."

"Then you never see yourself, or your mirror is a poor one. The more I look at you, the more convinced I am that you look less childish, somehow, and that you have quite a grown-up air."

"How absurd, father! In what does this change consist?"

"I can hardly explain, for your features have not changed, thank Heaven! but there is an air of sweet and gentle dignity about you that I never noticed before, and an expression of serene happiness on your features."

"How could it be otherwise when you have returned, father? It is something better than joy, it is happiness I feel on seeing you again, and happiness inclines one to be rather quiet and serious, you know."

"If you go on talking in this way my eyes will be so full of tears I shall not be able to see you at all, so let us change the subject. You have been well, you say; that is the main thing, of course, but have you not been lonely and dull here, my poor child? The winter months are so gloomy in the country."

"I have not been lonely a single moment, father. Haven't I my books, and my piano, and my embroidery, and my walks to occupy me?"

"And Suzanne, I scarcely need ask if she has been kind to you?"

"As you know her so well you must know that she has been kindness itself."

"And —"

But Yvon stopped short.

He was on the point of asking Sabine if her nervousness was abating, and if the attacks to which she had been subject from childhood were becoming less frequent, but he feared he might sadden his daughter, and decided it would be better to question the housekeeper on the subject.

So, to cover his sudden pause, he said:

"So you really enjoy yourself here in the country, you say? You have but to express a wish, you know, my dearest. The sea air has been recommended for you, it is true, but the coasts of France are extensive and there

is abundant room for choice, and if you prefer any other place — "

"No, father, this place suits me perfectly. The surroundings are delightful, and I feel so much at home here that it would be ungrateful in me to leave the place unless you desire it."

"You know very well that I only desire what you desire."

"That sounds very fine, father."

"What do you mean, my child?"

"I mean that your actions do not always correspond with your words."

"What actions?"

"You say that you only desire what I desire. Yet how often I have begged you to give up the journeys that keep you away from me so much of the time."

"That is different. It is really for your sake, my darling child. I have my reasons."

"Yes, I know, my poor, dear father. It is to enrich me that you devote so much time to your business. But what is the use of so much money? But you have told me nothing about yourself! What kind of a trip did you have this time?"

"A remarkably successful one."

"The roads were better this time, then, and you did not take cold? I am so glad, we had so many snowstorms last month. I used to say to Suzanne again and again while we were sitting by the fire warm and comfortable, 'I am afraid my poor dear father is shivering with cold and making only a couple of miles an hour on account of the snow.'"

"Don't worry any more, my dear child. The trip is over now, and it was not only less fatiguing than usual, but unusually profitable."

"Is that really so? Then why was your return so long delayed, father?"

"A complication of business interests, that is all."

"If you knew how uneasy I always am during your absence! It is foolish, I know, but I shall be spared all these fears hereafter, for you intend to keep your promise, do you not?"

"What promise?"

"Not to travel, or, rather, not to leave me any more."

"I promised you on condition that no unforeseen circumstance —"

"No excuses, now. You will remain with me?"

"Always."

"Will you swear it?"

"By a father's love."

"Ah, I know what happiness is now," cried Sabine, throwing herself on her father's neck, "and yet, I have no words to tell you how happy I am, so, to reward you —"

"Well," said Cloarek, smiling, but deeply moved by the touching expression of his daughter's features, "so, to reward me —"

"I am going to ask a favour of you, as you are always reproaching me for never asking for anything."

"You could not please me more, my dear child. Well, let me hear what it is. What have you to ask of me?"

"Your protection and aid."

"For whom?"

"For a person who is worthy of it, and of whom Suzanne, too, intends to speak to you. But you see how jealous I am, I wish to be the first to recommend my protégé."

"The protégé of both of you, then?"

"Yes, both of us."

"Then you are tolerably certain of having your request granted. But what does the person desire?"

"Oh, he doesn't dare to ask or even desire anything. He is so timid. That is the reason Suzanne and I both resolved to ask for him. His position is so interesting and so trying!"

"My poor, tender-hearted child, how deeply in earnest you are, and how you are blushing! I am sure the person you have in mind must be both very deserving and very unfortunate."

"Yes, father, and when one sees a person every day, and thus learns to know and appreciate him, one's interest naturally increases."

"But of whom are you speaking, my child?"

"Of M. Onésime."

"And who is M. Onésime? Onésime, Onésime, — I have heard the name before, it seems to me."

"M. Onésime is Suzanne's nephew."

"Ah, yes, I recollect now. She has often spoken of him. He is the son of the sister she lost a couple of years ago."

"Yes, my dear father, he is an orphan. He had a government clerkship at Lille, but he was obliged to give that up, and as he could not secure any other situation there, Suzanne sent for him to come here and stay until he could find something to do."

"What, he is here?"

"Yes, father."

"He is living here in this house?"

"He has been living here for the last two months."

"Why are you blushing again?"

"But I am not blushing, father, I assure you."

"Surely, my dear child, you cannot suppose that I would be displeased because our friend Suzanne, to whom we owe so much, has entertained her nephew here, especially as he must be a well-behaved boy, or Suzanne would not have kept him with her."

"You must see him, father, and then you can judge for yourself."

"But how did he happen to lose his place?"

"He was a copyist, but his sight is so bad that it interfered with his work, and they dismissed him. You can imagine, my dear father, how painful his present position

is to him, for he has a good education, and cannot bear to be idle. His defective vision will make it very difficult for him to secure any position, I fear; so, father, I have been counting, that is to say, Suzanne and I have been counting on you to assist and advise M. Onésime. I am sure when you see him and know him, you will do anything in the world for him, he is so kind and good, and you will pity him and love him so much."

It is impossible to describe the naïve and touching manner in which Sabine uttered these last words, her changing colour and gently heaving breast betraying the lively interest she felt in her protégé.

Cloarek stood silent and thoughtful for a moment. He was beginning to understand the change he had noticed in his daughter's manner and expression. At last the young girl, surprised and somewhat alarmed by Yvon's silence, asked :

"Why do you not answer me, my dear father?"

"Tell me, my child, since Suzanne's nephew has been living here, what has he done? What kind of a life has he led?"

"The same life we have led, father. When we go out to walk, he goes with us; if we remain at home, he remains. We make him read to us a good deal, — he reads so well and with so much expression. Sometimes we play duets together, for he is an excellent musician. He is very well up, too, in history, and it is very pleasant and instructive to hear him talk on such subjects, and lastly, he is always trying to do us some little service, though he doesn't always succeed, for his poor sight makes him very awkward. But that is his only fault, my dear father," added Sabine, with charming ingenuousness, "and though he surely cannot be held accountable for it, Suzanne is pitiless toward it, for she is always making fun of him."

"You do not make fun of him, I am sure."

"It would be cruel in me to do that, father, for he

tries to be the first to laugh at his mishaps, though they worry him terribly. It is so sad to be almost blind. And this very evening — you can judge from that how courageous he is — he scalded his hand nearly to the bone with boiling water. You will see, father, what a dreadful burn it was. Well, for all that, M. Onésime had self-control and courage enough not only to make no ado about it, but also to go on with his reading as if nothing had happened, so it was only by the merest chance that we discovered the accident nearly an hour afterward."

"Really, M. Onésime seems to be quite a hero."

"A hero; no, father, for, as we were saying this evening, only persons who kill and spill blood are called heroes, while M. Onésime —"

"Spills boiling water."

"Why, father!"

"Why do you look at me so reproachfully?"

"It seems strange that you, too, who are always so just —"

"Why, what great injustice have I been guilty of, my child?"

"You are making light of a very serious matter, father, for even Suzanne turned pale with fright when she saw his burn, though she is always ridiculing him in the most merciless manner. And why? Because he has such a horror of everything that is cruel and bloodthirsty. Only this evening we had quite a discussion with Suzanne, and M. Onésime was on my side, and he is on my side only when I am right, so I feel sure in advance that you will agree with us."

"What was the subject of this discussion, my child?"

"M. Onésime was reading, in that newspaper you see over there on the table, an account of the escape of a famous privateer named Captain l'Endurci. You have read it too, perhaps, father."

"No," replied Cloarek, repressing an involuntary

movement of surprise and alarm; "no, my child. Well, what do you and M. Onésime think of the corsair?"

"His cruelty shocked us, dear father; for would you believe it? to regain his liberty he killed two men and severely wounded a third. Suzanne approved his conduct, claiming that he had behaved in a very brave and heroic manner, but M. Onésime said, and this proves the generosity of his heart —"

"Well, what did M. Onésime say?"

"That he would rather remain a prisoner all his life than owe his freedom to the death of another person. Don't you think that M. Onésime and I are right?"

"I hardly know what to say, my child. A humdrum merchant like myself is not a very good judge of such matters. Still, it seems to me that you and M. Onésime are rather hard on the poor privateer."

"But, father, read the frightful story, and you will see —"

"But listen, this privateer had a family, perhaps, that he tenderly loved, and that he was hoping soon to see again, and in his despair at finding himself a prisoner —"

"A family! Men who live in the midst of carnage have families that they love tenderly? Is that possible, father?"

"Why, do not even wolves love their young?"

"I don't know anything about that; but if they do love them, they love them after the manner of wolves, I suppose, bringing them a piece of their bleeding prey when they are little, and leading them out to attack and devour the poor lambs when they get older."

A bitter expression flitted over Cloarek's face; then he answered, smiling:

"After all, you and M. Onésime may be right. If you would talk to me about silks and merino I might hold my own, but I am not much of a judge of privateers and privateering."

"I was sure you would agree with us. How could a

person who is as generous, compassionate, and affectionate as you are think otherwise? or, rather, I could not think differently from what you do, my dear father, for if I have a horror of everything that is cruel and wicked, if I love everything that is good and beautiful, is it not to you and your example I owe it, as well as to the precepts of my poor mother whom you loved so devotedly? for not a day passes that Suzanne does not relate some instance of your deep affection for her."

The conversation was here interrupted by the entrance of the housekeeper, candle in hand, who, to Yvon's great surprise, announced:

"I am very sorry, but it is ten o'clock, monsieur."

"Well, what of it, Suzanne?"

"It is the hour the doctor said mademoiselle must go to bed, you know."

"Give me just a quarter of an hour more, Suzanne?"

"Not a single minute, mademoiselle."

"On the evening of my return, you might permit this slight dissipation, it seems to me, Suzanne."

"Heaven be thanked, mademoiselle will have plenty of opportunity to see you now, but allowing her to sit up later than ten o'clock is not to be thought of. She would be sure to be tired out, if not ill, to-morrow."

"In that case, I have nothing to say except good night, my dear child," said Cloarek, taking his daughter's face in his two hands, and kissing her tenderly on the forehead. "Sleep well, my dearest, and may the morning find you well and happy."

"You need feel no anxiety on that score, my dear father. Now I know that you are here beside me, and that you will be with me, not only to-morrow but always, I shall go to sleep with that blissful thought on my mind, and I shall sleep on and on and on like a dormouse — that is the word, isn't it, Suzanne? So good night, my dear father, good night, good night."

Then she whispered:

"I am sure Suzanne is going to speak to you about M. Onésime. How glad I am I got ahead of her. Good night, dearest father, good night."

"Good night, and pleasant dreams!"

"It will be the best night I have passed for many a month. Good night, my beloved father, good night."

"Good night, my child."

Then turning to the housekeeper, Cloarek added:

"Come back presently, Suzanne, I want to talk with you."

"Very well, monsieur; I have something I wish to speak to you about, too."

When he was left alone, Cloarek began to walk the room. As he passed the table, the *Journal of the Empire* attracted his attention. He picked it up and glanced over the article to which his daughter had alluded.

"How indiscreet in Verduron to make a strictly confidential letter public, and without warning me!" he exclaimed, evidently much annoyed. "I have always feared that man's stupidity and greed would cause me trouble sooner or later. Fortunately, I have concealed my place of abode from him. To think of this happening now, when my child's feelings and mental condition make dissimulation more imperative than ever. Poor child, such a discovery would kill her!"

At that very instant the housekeeper reëntered the room.

CHAPTER XII.

SUZANNE'S ENLIGHTENMENT.

"My dear Suzanne," said M. Cloarek, "first of all, I want to thank you for the excellent care you have taken of my daughter."

"Poor Mlle. Sabine, didn't I nurse her when she was a baby, and isn't she almost like my own child to me?"

"You have been a second mother to my child, I know. And it is on account of the tender affection you have always manifested toward her that I wish to talk with you on a very important matter."

"What is it, monsieur?"

"You sent for your nephew in my absence. He has been here nearly two months, I understand."

"Yes, and it is in regard to the poor fellow that I wish to talk with you this evening, monsieur. I will explain —"

"Sabine has told me all about it."

"Great Heavens! you are not angry, I hope."

"Not angry, Suzanne, but greatly worried and alarmed."

"Alarmed! Alarmed about what?"

"The effect of your nephew's presence in this house."

"Had I foreseen that it would be disagreeable to you, I would not have sent for the poor boy; but he was so unhappy, and I knew your kindness of heart so well, that I thought I might take the liberty —"

"You have rendered too valuable service to each and every member of my family, Suzanne, for your relatives

not to have a right to my interest and assistance. What I reproach you for is a great imprudence."

"Excuse me, monsieur, but I do not understand."

"Your nephew is young?"

"Twenty-five."

"He is well educated?"

"Too well for his position, monsieur. My poor sister and her husband made great sacrifices for him. His sight being so poor, they gave him an excellent education in the hope he might enter the clergy, but Onésime felt that he had no calling that way, so there was nothing for him to do but secure a clerkship."

"I know the rest, but how about his personal appearance? What kind of a looking young man is he?"

"The poor fellow is neither handsome nor ugly, monsieur. He has a very kind and gentle manner, but his extreme near-sightedness gives him a rather scared look. He is really the best-hearted boy that ever lived. Ask mademoiselle, and see what she will tell you."

"Really, Suzanne, such blindness on your part amazes me."

"Such blindness, monsieur?"

"Is it possible, Suzanne, that you, who are a person of so much experience and good sense, have not felt, I will not say the impropriety, but the grave imprudence there is in having your nephew under the same roof with my daughter, and allowing them to live in the extremely intimate relations of such a secluded existence as you lead here?"

"I know that I am only a servant, monsieur, and that my nephew —"

"That is not the question at all. Have not I and my daughter always striven to prove that we regarded you as a friend, and not as a servant?"

"Then I do not understand the cause of your reproaches."

"And that is very unfortunate, for if you had been

more clear-sighted, you would long since have discovered what has happened."

"Good Heavens! what has happened, monsieur?"

"Sabine loves your nephew."

"Mademoiselle!"

"She loves him, I tell you."

"Mademoiselle loves Onésime! Monsieur cannot be in earnest. It is impossible."

"Impossible, and why?"

"Because the poor boy is as timid as a girl; because he is not at all good-looking; because he sees very badly, a defect that makes him commit twenty blunders a day, at which mademoiselle is not unfrequently the first to laugh. He does not resemble a hero of romance in the least. Oh, no, monsieur, you need feel no anxiety on that score. Mademoiselle has always been very kind and considerate to Onésime, because he is my nephew, and she pitied him, but —"

"Ah, blind woman that you are, not to have foreseen that, in a person of Sabine's character, in a person of her extreme sensibility and angelic kindness of heart, pity was almost certain to lead to a more tender sentiment, — as it has!"

"Can it be possible that mademoiselle would condescend to look at a poor fellow like Onésime?"

"It is precisely because he is poor and helpless and timid, and because his infirmity places him in such an exceptional and painful position, that Sabine was almost certain to love him, and you, who know her as well as I do, should have foreseen this. I hope to Heaven that your blindness may not prove disastrous in its consequences."

"Ah, monsieur," responded the housekeeper, contritely, "your words enlighten me, now, when it is too late. But no, I cannot believe what you have just told me. Mlle. Sabine has not admitted that she loves Onésime, has she?"

"Oh, no; she has not admitted it, but I am satisfied of the fact. She is so candid and so sincere that one can read her heart as one reads an open book. She does love him, I tell you, and this destroys all the plans I had formed. But what is the matter? Why are you sobbing so? Suzanne, Suzanne, get up," cried Cloarek, seeing the housekeeper throw herself at his feet.

"I have such a dreadful fear."

"Explain."

"Good Heavens, monsieur, what if you should suppose that in asking my nephew here I was actuated by a desire to interest mademoiselle in him, and so bring about a marriage between them!"

"Suzanne, you do me a gross injustice by supposing me capable of such a suspicion."

"Tell me, oh, tell me that you do not believe me capable of such a thing."

"I repeat that you have been thoughtless and imprudent. That is all, and that is enough; but as for accusing you of any such shameful plotting, that would be utterly absurd on my part. I understand, too, how certain peculiarities in your nephew's character seemed a sufficient guarantee against any such possibility, and that you never suspected that any such danger could threaten my daughter."

"Alas! that is the truth, monsieur. I didn't consider Onésime any more dangerous than an infant."

"I believe you, but the evil is done, nevertheless."

"But it can be repaired. Onésime shall leave the house at daybreak, to-morrow morning, and never set foot in it again."

"And Sabine? His sudden departure would grieve her terribly, it might even kill her, weak and nervous as she is, — for she is her poor dear mother over again, in her sensitiveness and extreme susceptibility."

"*Mon Dieu*, I see, I see! How culpable I have been!" sobbed the governess. "What are we to do, monsieur? What are we to do?"

"I have no idea myself."

Cloarek paced the room in silence several minutes, then he asked, suddenly:

"Where is your nephew?"

"In the Blue Room, monsieur. I told him to wait there until I could let him know the result of my interview with you."

"Send him to me".

"Here, monsieur?"

"Yes."

"Oh, monsieur, have pity on him, have pity on him, I beseech you!" cried Suzanne, clasping her hands imploringly. "I swear to you that it was not his fault. The poor boy is innocent of any wrong-doing, even in thought. He hasn't the slightest suspicion of all this, I am sure. Have pity on him, I implore you!"

"Send him to me, I say."

"He shall leave the house this very night, monsieur, I swear it!"

"And my daughter! You want her to die of grief, perhaps!"

"One word, monsieur. It may be that mademoiselle's affection for Onésime is only a youthful fancy that time and absence will soon cause her to forget."

"But what if she does not forget it? What if this love is really deep and true, as it must be, if it has once really taken root in a heart like Sabine's? No, no, it would be an insult to the poor child to believe her capable of loving in that way. She is her mother over again, I tell you."

"Alas! monsieur, what you say nearly breaks my heart, and yet I am forced to admit that you are right. I never realised, until this very moment, all the possible consequences of this deplorable intimacy; for, unfor-

tunately, this is not the only thing that must be considered."

"What do you mean?"

"Monsieur —"

"Speak, speak, I say."

"What if, — and it would not be his fault, remember, monsieur, — what if he should not share the affection he has inspired in mademoiselle —"

"Damnation!" exclaimed Cloarek.

Then after a moment's silence he said, sternly:

"Send your nephew here."

"Do not ask me to do that, monsieur!" pleaded Suzanne, in terror.

"Obey me, do you hear?"

"Not if you kill me, monsieur," replied Suzanne, resolutely; "no, he shall not come. I will make him leave the house. I will not expose him to —"

"To what? To my violence, my anger, I suppose you mean. Don't you see that my daughter's love for him renders him sacred in my eyes?"

"But if he does not love her, monsieur?"

"If he does not love her?" exclaimed Cloarek, becoming frightfully pale; then, without adding a word, and before the housekeeper, overcome with consternation, could make so much as a movement to prevent it, he rushed out of the parlour and into the room where Onésime was waiting to hear the result of his aunt's interview with the master of the house.

To open the door of this room, and close and lock it behind him, to prevent Suzanne from entering and Onésime from leaving it, was only the work of an instant, and he thus found himself alone with Suzanne's nephew.

CHAPTER XIII.

ONÉSIME'S CONQUEST.

On hearing the violent opening and closing of the door, Onésime sprang up surprised and alarmed, for he was expecting to see only his aunt, and the heavy tread of the person who had just entered so boisterously indicated the presence of a stranger.

Cloarek, who had recovered the composure which had momentarily deserted him, scrutinised Onésime with anxious curiosity. At the first glance the countenance of the young man seemed gentle and prepossessing, but soon, forgetting the infirmity that prevented him from gaining more than a vague idea of objects a few feet from him, and seeing him gaze at him intently without giving any sign of recognition, he began to consider Onésime's manner extremely insolent, even audacious.

Suzanne's nephew, surprised at the prolonged silence, advanced a step or two in the hope of recognising the intruder, and at last asked, hesitatingly:

"Who is it?"

Cloarek, still forgetting the young man's infirmity, thought the question impertinent, and replied:

"Who is it! It is the master of the house, I would have you know."

"M. Cloarek!" exclaimed Onésime, recoiling a little, for the speaker's manner and tone indicated only too plainly that his, Onésime's, presence in the house was unwelcome to Sabine's father, so after a moment he said, in a trembling, almost timid voice:

"In complying with the wishes of my aunt, I believed, monsieur, that her request was made with your approval, or at least that you would not disapprove her kindness to me. But for that, I should not have thought of accepting her invitation."

"I hope so, indeed."

"I must therefore beg you to excuse an indiscretion of which I have been the involuntary accomplice, monsieur. I will leave your house to-morrow."

"And where will you go? What will you do?" demanded Cloarek, abruptly. "What will become of you afterward?"

"Not understanding the feeling that prompts these questions, you cannot be surprised that I hesitate to answer them," responded Onésime, with gentle dignity.

"My feeling may be kindly, and it may be the opposite, — that depends upon circumstances. I shall know presently, however."

"You seem to constitute yourself the sole arbiter of my destiny, monsieur!" exclaimed Onésime, with respectful firmness. "By what right, may I ask?"

"On the contrary, you seem to have made yourself the arbiter of my destiny," exclaimed Cloarek, impetuously.

"I do not understand you, monsieur."

"Do you dare to look me in the face and answer me in that way?"

"Look you in the face, monsieur? I wish that I could, but alas! at this distance I am utterly unable to distinguish your features."

"True, monsieur," replied Cloarek, with much less brusqueness, "I had forgotten your infirmity. But though you cannot see, you may rest assured that I have an eye that nothing escapes. It is one advantage that I have over you, and one that I shall profit by, I assure you."

"I assure you that this advantage will be of very little

service to you so far as I am concerned. I have never had anything to conceal in my life."

This odd mixture of frankness and gentleness, of melancholy and dignity, touched Cloarek; nevertheless he tried to resist its softening influence.

"I am blessed with a very small amount of penetration, monsieur," continued Onésime, "but your questions and the tone in which they are asked, as well as some of your remarks, lead me to suppose that you have a grievance against me, though I am unfortunately ignorant of the cause."

"You love my daughter?" said Cloarek, gazing searchingly at the youth as if resolved to read his inmost thoughts.

Onésime turned red and pale by turns, and felt so much like falling that he was obliged to reseat himself at a small table and bury his face in his hands.

In his attempt to cover his face the handkerchief that was bound around his hand fell off, disclosing to view the terrible burn he had received, and though Cloarek was accustomed to seeing all sorts of hurts, the grave nature of this one made him shudder and say to himself:

"Poor wretch, how he must suffer! A person must have a good deal of courage to endure such torture uncomplainingly. Such courage, combined with such amiability of character, as well as quiet dignity, at least indicates nobility of heart."

Seeing how completely overcome Onésime seemed to be, Yvon asked, in rather more friendly tones:

"How am I to interpret your silence? You do not answer me."

"What can I say, monsieur?"

"You confess it, then?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"And is my daughter ignorant of this love?"

"Ignorant of it! Why, monsieur, I would rather die

than reveal it to her. I thought I had concealed my secret in the depths of my innermost soul, so I have no idea how you can have discovered what I have almost succeeded in hiding from myself."

"Why did you not endeavour to overcome a feeling that could only make you unhappy?"

"Believing every one ignorant of it, I abandoned myself to it with delight. Up to this time I have only known misfortune. This love is the first happiness of my life, as it will be the only consolation of the dreary destiny that awaits me."

"You would be separated from my daughter sooner or later. Did that thought never occur to you?"

"No, monsieur, I did not stop to reflect. I think I loved merely for the happiness of loving. I loved without hope, but also without fear and without remorse."

"So you were not even deterred by a fear that I would find out about this love some day or other?"

"I did not reflect at all, as I told you just now. I loved only for the pleasure of loving. Ah, monsieur, when one is as I am, almost entirely isolated from external objects and the diversion of mind they cause, it is easy to yield oneself entirely to the solitary enjoyment of a single, all-absorbing passion."

"But if your sight is so bad, you can scarcely know how my daughter looks."

"During all the weeks I have been living in this house, I never saw Mlle. Sabine distinctly until this evening."

"And why this evening rather than any other evening?"

"Because she insisted on aiding my aunt in dressing a severe burn on my hand, and, while she was doing this, she came near enough for me to be able to distinguish her features perfectly."

"In that case, how did you come to love her?"

"How did I come to love her? Why, what I love

in her," exclaimed Onésime, "is her noble and generous heart, the sweetness of her disposition, the charms of her mind. What do I love in her? Why, her sweet and soothing presence and her voice, — her voice, so gentle and touching when she utters words of friendly interest or consolation."

"Then the thought that you might become Sabine's husband some day has never occurred to you?"

"I love her too much for that, monsieur."

"What do you mean?"

"You forget, monsieur, that I am half blind, and that, by reason of this infirmity, I am doomed to ridicule, to poverty, or a humiliating idleness. I, who can never be anything but a burden to those who feel an interest in me, the idea that I should have the audacity — No, no, I repeat it, I even swear, that I have loved and still love Mlle. Sabine as one loves the good and the beautiful, without any other hope than of the heavenly felicity the love of the good and the beautiful inspires. This, monsieur, is what I have felt and still feel. If my frankness is convincing, deign to promise me, monsieur, that I shall at least take your esteem with me when I leave this house."

"You have won this esteem; you deserve it, Onésime," replied Cloarek, earnestly; "and after this assurance on my part, you will permit me to ask what you intend to do after leaving here."

"I shall endeavour to find some employment similar to that I was engaged in before; but, however modest and laborious my situation in life may be, if it enables me to earn my living, it is all I ask."

"But are you not afraid you will lose this situation for the same reasons you did before?"

"Alas! monsieur, if I allowed myself to think of all the trials and disappointments that are, undoubtedly, in store for me, I should become utterly disheartened," answered Onésime, sadly.

"It was not to discourage you that I ventured this reminder. On the contrary, I wish, and certainly hope to find the means of helping you to escape from a position which must be unspeakably trying."

"Ah, monsieur, how kind you are! How have I deserved —"

The conversation was here interrupted by several hurried knocks at the door, and Suzanne's voice was heard, crying:

"Open the door, monsieur, for pity's sake!"

Cloarek instantly complied with the request.

"What is the matter?" he exclaimed, seeing Suzanne standing there, pale and terrified.

"Thérèse was just closing the windows in the dining-room, when she saw, in the moonlight, two men peering over the garden wall."

"Thérèse is a coward, afraid of her own shadow, I expect."

"Oh, no, monsieur, Thérèse did see the two men distinctly. They were evidently about to enter the garden, when the noise she made in opening the window frightened them away."

"These fears seem to me greatly exaggerated," replied Cloarek; "still, take good care not to say anything about this to Sabine to-morrow. It will only make the poor child terribly uneasy. It is a splendid moonlight night, and I will go out into the garden and satisfy myself that everything is all right."

"Go out into the garden!" cried Suzanne, in great alarm. "Don't think of such a thing. It would be very dangerous, I am sure."

"That is all nonsense, my dear Suzanne," said Cloarek, turning toward the door. "You are as great a coward as Thérèse."

"First, let me go and wake Segoffin, monsieur," pleaded Suzanne. "I tried before I came to you, but this time I will knock so loud that he can't help hearing me."

"And at the same time wake my daughter and frighten her nearly to death by all this hubbub in the house."

"You are right, monsieur, and yet you ought not to venture out entirely alone."

"What are you doing, Onésime?" asked Cloarek, seeing the younger man making his way toward the door. "Where are you going?"

"I am going with you, monsieur."

"And what for?"

"My aunt thinks there may be some danger, monsieur."

"And of what assistance could you be?" asked Yvon, not curtly or scornfully this time, for Onésime's devotion touched him.

"It is true that I can be of very little assistance," sighed the unfortunate youth, "but if there is any danger, I can at least share it, and, though my sight is poor, perhaps, as a sort of compensation, I can hear remarkably well, so I may be able to find out which way the men went if they are still prowling around the house."

This artless offer was made with such evident sincerity, that Cloarek, exchanging a compassionate look with Suzanne, said, kindly:

"I thank you for your offer, my young friend, and I would accept it very gratefully if your hand did not require attention. The burn is evidently a deep one, and must pain you very much, so you had better attend to it without further delay, Suzanne," he added, turning to the housekeeper.

Cloarek went out into the garden. The moon was shining brightly on the sleeping waves. A profound stillness pervaded the scene, and no other human being was visible. Climbing upon the wall, he gazed into the depths below, for the garden wall on the side next the sea was built upon the brow of a steep cliff. Cloarek

tried to discover if the grass and shrubbery on the side of the cliff had been broken or trampled, but the investigation revealed no trace of any recent visitor. He listened attentively, but heard only the murmur of the waves as they broke upon the beach, and, concluding that there was no cause for alarm as such a thing as a robbery had not been heard of since Sabine had lived there, he was about to leave the terrace and reënter the house when he saw one of those rockets that are used in the navy as signals at night suddenly dart up from behind a clump of bushes half-way up the beach.

The rocket swiftly described a curve, its stream of light gleaming brightly against the dark blue heavens for an instant, then died out. This occurrence seemed so remarkable to Cloarek, that he hastily retraced his steps to see if there were any vessel in sight to respond to this signal from the shore, but no vessel of any sort or kind was visible, — only the broad expanse of ocean shimmering in the moonlight met his gaze.

After vainly endeavouring to explain this singular occurrence for some time, but finally deciding that the rocket must have been fired by smugglers as a signal, he returned to the house.

This occurrence, which ought, perhaps, to have furnished the captain with abundant food for thought, closely following as it did the bold abduction of which he had been the victim, was speedily forgotten in the grave reflections that his conversation with Onésime had awakened.

CHAPTER XIV.

ARGUMENTS FOR AND AGAINST.

WHEN Cloarek rapped at the door of his daughter's room the next morning, she promptly responded to the summons, smiling and happy.

"Well, my child, did you rest well?" he inquired.

"Splendidly, father. I had the most delightful dreams, for you bring me happiness even in my sleep."

"Tell me about these delightful dreams. I am always anxious to hear about everything that makes you happy, whether it be an illusion or reality," he responded, anxious to bring the conversation around naturally to the subject of Onésime. "Come, I am listening. What brilliant castles in Spain did you behold in your slumbers?"

"Oh, I am not ambitious, father, even in my dreams."

"Is that really so, my child?"

"It is indeed, father. My desires are very modest. Luxury and display have no charms for me. I dreamed last night that I was spending my life with you, — with you and dear Suzanne, and with Segoffin, who is so warmly attached to you."

"And who else?"

"Oh, yes, I forgot."

"Thérèse, I suppose?"

"No, not Thérèse."

"Who was it, then?"

"M. Onésime."

"M. Onésime? I do not understand that. How did M. Onésime happen to be living with us?"

"We were married."

The words were uttered in such a frank and ingenuous manner that Cloarek could not doubt the perfect truthfulness of his daughter's account; and rather in doubt as to whether he ought to congratulate himself on this singular dream or not, he asked, a little anxiously:

"So you and M. Onésime were married, you say?"

"Yes, father."

"And I had consented to the marriage?"

"You must have done so, as we were married. I don't mean that we were just married,—we seemed to have been married a long time. We were all in the parlour. Three of us, you and Onésime and I, were sitting on the big sofa. Suzanne was crocheting by the window, and Segoffin was on his knees fixing the fire. You had been silent for several minutes, father, when, suddenly taking M. Onésime's hand and mine,—you were sitting between us,—you said: 'Do you know what I have been thinking?' 'No, father,' M. Onésime and I answered (for naturally he, too, called you father). 'Well,' you continued, 'I have been thinking that there is not a happier man in the world than I am. To have two children who adore each other, and two faithful old servants, or rather two tried friends, and spend one's life in peace and plenty with them, surely this is enough and more than enough to thank the good God for now and always, my children.' And as you spoke, father, your eyes filled with tears."

"Waking as well as dreaming, you are, and ever will be, the best and most affectionate of daughters," said Cloarek, deeply touched. "But there is one thing about your dream that surprises me very much."

"And what is that?"

"Your marriage with Onésime."

"Really?"

"Yes."

"How strange. It seemed so perfectly natural to me that I wasn't at all surprised at it."

"But in the first place, though this is not the greatest objection, by any means, M. Onésime has no fortune."

"But how often you have told me that all these business trips, and all these frequent absences that grieve me so much, have been made solely for the purpose of amassing a handsome dowry for me."

"That is true."

"Then, in that case, M. Onésime does not need any fortune."

"Nevertheless, though it is not absolutely indispensable that M. Onésime should possess a fortune, it is certainly very desirable. There is another objection."

"Another?"

"M. Onésime has no profession and consequently no assured social position."

"He is not to blame for that, poor fellow! Who could possibly consider his enforced idleness a crime? Will, education, capability, none of these are lacking. It is his terrible infirmity that proves such an obstacle to everything he undertakes."

"You are right, my child; this infirmity is an insuperable obstacle that will unfortunately prevent him from achieving success in any career; from creating any position for himself, and even from marrying, except in dreams, understand."

"I don't understand you at all, my dear father. I really don't."

"What! my child, don't you understand that it would be folly in any woman to marry a half-blind man who cannot see ten feet in front of him? don't you understand that in such a case the rôles would be entirely reversed, and that, instead of protecting his wife, as every man ought to do, M. Onésime will have to be protected by the woman who would be foolish enough to marry him?"

"It seems to me only right that the person who is able to protect the other should do so."

"Certainly; but this duty devolves upon the man."

"Yes, when he is able to fulfil this duty; when he is not, it devolves upon the wife."

"If she is foolish enough, I repeat, to accept such a life of self-sacrifice and weighty responsibility."

"Foolish?"

"Idiotic, rather. Don't look at me so indignantly."

"Listen to me, father."

"I am listening."

"You have reared me with the utmost kindness and devotion; you have anticipated my every wish; you have surrounded me with every comfort; and for my sake you have exposed yourself to all the fatigue and discomfort of long business trips. Am I not right?"

"It was not only a pleasure, but my duty to do these things for you, my dear child."

"A duty?"

"The most sacred of all duties."

"To protect me — to be my guide and my support, you mean, do you not?"

"Precisely. It is the duty of every parent."

"That is exactly what I was coming at," said Sabine, with amusing naïveté. "It is a father's duty to protect his child, you say?"

"Certainly."

"But, father, suppose that you should meet with an accident during one of your journeys; suppose, for instance, that you should lose your sight, would I be foolish or idiotic if I did everything in my power to repay you for all you have done for me, and to act, in my turn, the part of guide, support, and protector? Our rôles would be reversed, as you say. Still, what daughter would not be proud and happy to do for her father what I would do for you? Ah, well, why should not a wife manifest the same devotion toward her husband

that a daughter manifests toward her father? I am sure you will not be able to refute that argument, my dear father."

"But your comparison, though extremely touching, is by no means just. In consequence of some misfortune, or some deplorable accident, a girl might find herself obliged to become the support and protector of her father. In such a case, it is very grand and noble in her to devote her life and energies to him; but she has not deliberately chosen her father, so she is performing a sacred duty, while the woman who is free to choose would, I repeat, — don't glare at me so, — be a fool, yes, an idiot, to select for a husband — "

"An unfortunate man who needs to be surrounded with the tenderest solicitude," cried Sabine, interrupting her father. "So you really believe that a woman would be committing an act of folly if she made such a choice. Say that again, father, if you want me to believe it, — you, who have so generously devoted your life to your child, who have been so lenient to her many weaknesses, who have made every sacrifice for her, — tell me that it would be arrant folly to devote one's life to an unfortunate creature to whom Fate has been most unkind; tell me that it would be arrant folly to cling to him because an infirmity kept everybody else aloof from him; tell me this, father, and I will believe you."

"No, my generous, noble-hearted child, I do not say that. I should be lying if I did," exclaimed Cloarek, quite carried away by Sabine's generous enthusiasm; "no, I cannot doubt the divine happiness that one finds in devoting oneself to a person one loves; no, I cannot doubt the attraction that courage and resignation under suffering exert over all superior natures."

"So you see that my dream is not as extraordinary as you thought, after all," replied the girl, smiling.

"You are a doughty antagonist, and I will admit that

I am beaten, or rather convinced, if you can answer one more objection as successfully."

"And what is that?"

"When a man loves, he loves body and soul; you must admit that. The contemplation of the charming face of a beloved wife is as sweet to a man as the realisation of her merits and virtues. Now, in a long conversation that I had last evening with M. Onésime, at your recommendation, remember, I asked him if he could see a person a few feet off, distinctly. He replied that he could not, and remarked in this connection that he had seen you plainly but once, and that was yesterday when you were assisting Suzanne in binding up his hand. The most inconceivable thing in your dream-marriage, after all, is a husband who spends his life near his wife without ever seeing her except by accident, as it were."

"Ah, well, father, I, for my part, think such a state of affairs is not without its advantages, after all."

"Really, that is going a little too far, I think."

"I will prove it to you if you wish."

"I defy you to do it."

"But, father, I have read somewhere that nothing could be more sacrilegious than to leave always exposed to view the portraits of one's loved ones; for the eye finally becomes so accustomed to these lineaments that the effect is perceptibly impaired."

"There may be some truth in this remark, but I do not perceive any special advantage to be derived from it so far as you are concerned."

"But if, on the contrary, these portraits are in a case that is opened only when one desires to contemplate the beloved features, the impression produced upon you is powerful in proportion to the rarity of the treat."

"Your reasoning is fairly good, to say the least; but how about the other party, the person that can see? She will be obliged to close her eyes, I suppose, and keep

them closed, to prevent her husband's features from losing their charm."

"Are you really in earnest in making this objection?"

"Certainly I am."

"Then I will merely say in reply that, though I put myself in M. Onésime's place for a moment, that is no reason why I should renounce my own excellent eyesight, for I am not in the least afraid that I should ever tire of looking at my husband any more than I tire of looking at you, my dear father, and I know I could gaze at your face a hundred years without growing weary of reading on your noble features all your devoted tenderness for me," added Sabine, kissing her father fondly.

"My dear, dear child," murmured Cloarek, responding to his daughter's fervent caress, "how can I hope to contend successfully with your heart and reason. I must acknowledge myself beaten, I suppose, and confess that your dream is not so unreasonable, perhaps, after all, and that a woman might perhaps marry such a terribly near-sighted man if she really loved him. Nevertheless, in spite of your romantic way of regarding poor Onésime's infirmity, I should infinitely prefer — But, now I think of it —"

"Well, father?"

"During my travels I have heard a good deal about a young and wonderfully skilful surgeon, — a terrible gourmand, too, they say he is, by the way. It is his only fault, I understand. This young surgeon established himself in Paris a few years ago, and his fame has grown, until he is now considered one of the greatest celebrities of the scientific world. It is possible that he may be able to restore this poor fellow's sight."

"Do you really suppose there is any hope of that?" cried Sabine.

"I cannot say, my child, but I know several wonderful cures that Doctor Gasterini has effected, and I will write to him this very day. I am going out for a little

while, but I shall be back in an hour, and as I shall want to see you as soon as I return, you had better wait for me here."

On leaving Sabine, Cloarek went up to Onésime's room, and, desiring that their conversation should be of the most secret character and free from any possibility of interruption, he asked that young man to accompany him on a promenade he intended to take on the beach before dinner.

CHAPTER XV.

AN UNWELCOME VISITOR.

Soon after M. Cloarek left the house in company with Onésime, Segoffin might have been seen standing on the garden terrace with an old spy-glass levelled on an object that seemed to be absorbing his attention and exciting his surprise and curiosity to the highest pitch.

The object was a vessel that he had just discovered in the offing and that elicited the following comments as he watched its evolutions.

"It seems preposterous! Am I dreaming, or is that really our brig? It must be! That rigging, that mast, those lines, are certainly hers, and yet it cannot be. That is not her hull. With her barbette guns she sat as low in the water as a whaler. I don't see a single gun poking its nose out of this craft, though. No, no, it is not, of course it is not. This vessel is painted a dark gray, while the *Hell-hound* was black with scarlet stripes. And yet that big sail perched so rakishly over the stern, that rigging fine as a spider's web, there never was a vessel built except the *Hell-hound* that could carry such a stretch of canvas as that. But what an ass I am! She is putting about, so there's a sure way of satisfying myself of the identity I wish to verify, as M. Yvon used to say when he wore the robes of office and amused himself by throwing chief justices out of the window, — that is to read the name on her stern, as I shall be able to do in a minute or two, and — "

But Segoffin's soliloquy was here interrupted by a

familiar tap on the shoulder, and, turning quickly, he found himself face to face with Suzanne.

"That which is done can not be undone, but the devil take you, my dear, for disturbing me just at this time!" exclaimed M. Cloarek's head gunner, raising his glass to his eye again.

But unfortunately he was too late. The brig had completed the evolution, and the name on her stern was no longer visible, so the verification of her identity which Segoffin contemplated had become impossible.

"So the devil may have me and welcome, may he?" responded Suzanne, tartly. "You are very polite, I must say."

"Frankness is a duty between old friends like ourselves," said Segoffin, casting a regretful glance seaward. "I came here to amuse myself by watching the passing ships, and you had to come and interrupt me."

"You are right; frankness is a duty between us, Segoffin, so I may as well tell you, here and now, that no stone-deaf person was ever harder to wake than you."

"How do you know? Unfortunately for me and for you, Suzanne, you have never had a chance to see how I sleep," responded the head gunner, with a roguish smile.

"You are very much mistaken, for I rapped at your door last night."

"Ah!" exclaimed Segoffin, winking his only remaining eye with a triumphant air, "I have often told you that you would come to it sooner or later, and you have."

"Come to what?" inquired the housekeeper, without the slightest suspicion of her companion's real meaning.

"To stealing alone and on tiptoe to my room to—"

"You are an abominably impertinent creature, M. Segoffin. I rapped at your door to ask your aid and protection."

"Against whom?"

"But you are such a coward that you just lay there

pretending to be asleep and taking good care not to answer me."

"Tell me seriously, Suzanne, — what occurred last night? Did you really think you needed me?"

"Hear that, will you! They might have set fire to the house and murdered us, it wouldn't have made the slightest difference to you. M. Segoffin was snug in bed and there he remained."

"Set fire to the house and murdered you! What on earth do you mean?"

"I mean that two men tried to break into this house last night."

"They were two of your lovers, doubtless."

"Segoffin!"

"You had probably made a mistake in the date —"

But the head gunner never finished the unseemly jest. His usually impassive features suddenly assumed an expression of profound astonishment, succeeded by one of fear and anxiety. The change, in fact, was so sudden and so striking that Dame Roberts, forgetting her companion's impertinent remarks, exclaimed:

"Good Heavens, Segoffin, what is the matter with you? What are you looking at in that way?"

And following the direction of Segoffin's gaze, she saw a stranger, preceded by Thérèse, advancing toward them. The newcomer was a short, stout man with a very prominent abdomen. He wore a handsome blue coat, brown cassimere knee-breeches, high top-boots, and a long white waistcoat, across which dangled a double watch-chain lavishly decorated with a number of charms. In one hand he held a light cane with which he gaily switched the dust from his boots, and in the other he held his hat, which he had gallantly removed at the first sight of Dame Roberts. This newcomer was Floridor Verduron, the owner of the brig *Hell-hound*, usually commanded by Captain l'Endurci.

Up to this time Cloarek had concealed from Verduron

his real name as well as the motives which had led him to take up privateering. He had also taken special pains to keep his place of abode a secret from the owner of the privateer, a mutual friend having always served as an intermediary between the captain and the owner. Consequently, the dismay of the head gunner can be readily imagined when he reflected that, as the captain's real name and address had been discovered by M. Verduron, and that gentleman was wholly ignorant of the double part M. Cloarek was playing, his very first words were likely to unwittingly reveal a secret of the gravest importance. M. Verduron's presence also explained, at least in part, the arrival of the brig Segoffin had seen a short time before, and which he fancied he recognised under the sort of disguise he could not yet understand.

Meanwhile, M. Floridor Verduron was coming nearer and nearer. Suzanne noted this fact, and remarked:

"Who can this gentleman be? What a red face he has! I never saw him before. Why don't you answer me, Segoffin? Good Heavens, how strangely you look! And you are pale, very much paler than usual."

"It is the redness of this man's face that makes me look pale by contrast, I suppose," replied Segoffin, seeing himself confronted by a danger he was powerless to avert.

The servant, who was a few steps in advance of the visitor, now said to Suzanne:

"Dame Roberts, here is a gentleman who wishes to see the master on very important business, he says."

"You know very well that monsieur has gone out."

"That is what I told the gentleman, but he said he would wait for his return, as he must see monsieur."

As Thérèse finished her explanation of the intrusion, M. Verduron, who prided himself upon his good manners, and who had won fame in his earlier days as a skilful dancer of the minuet, paused about five yards from Dame Roberts and made her a very low bow, with his

elbows gracefully rounded, his heels touching each other, and his feet forming the letter V.

Dame Roberts, flattered by the homage rendered to her sex, responded with a ceremonious curtsey, saying *sotto voce* to Segoffin the while, with a sarcastically reproachful air:

"Notice how a polite gentleman ought to accost a lady."

M. Floridor Verduron, advancing a couple of steps, made another profound bow, to which Suzanne responded with equal deference, murmuring to Segoffin as if to pique him or arouse his emulation:

"These are certainly the manners of a grandee, — of an ambassador, in fact."

The head gunner, instead of replying, however, tried to get as much out of sight as possible behind an evergreen. M. Verduron's third and last salute (he considered three bows obligatory) was too much like the others to deserve any especial mention, and he was about to address Suzanne when he caught sight of the head gunner.

"What! you here?" he exclaimed, with a friendly nod. "I didn't see you, you old sea-wolf. And how is your eye getting along?"

"I have no use of it, as you see, M. Verduron, but don't let's talk about that, I beg of you. I have my reasons."

"I should think so, my poor fellow, for it would be rather making light of misfortune, wouldn't it, madame?" asked the visitor, turning to Suzanne, who bowed her assent with great dignity, and then said:

"The servant tells me you wish to see M. Cloarek on pressing business, monsieur."

"Yes, my dear madame, very pressing," replied the ship owner, gallantly. "It is doubtless to monsieur's wife I have the honour of speaking, and in that case, I —"

"Pardon me, monsieur, I am only the housekeeper."

"What! the cap—"

But the first syllable of the word captain had not left the ship owner's lips before the head gunner shouted at the top of his voice, at the same time seizing Suzanne suddenly by the arm:

"In Heaven's name, look! See there!"

The housekeeper was so startled that she uttered a shrill cry and did not even hear the dread syllable the visitor had uttered, but when she had partially recovered from her alarm, she exclaimed, sharply:

"Really, this is intolerable, Segoffin. You gave me such a scare I am all of a tremble now."

"But look over there," insisted the head gunner, pointing toward the cliffs; "upon my word of honour, one can hardly believe one's eyes."

"What is it? What do you see?" asked the ship owner, gazing intently in the direction indicated.

"It seems impossible, I admit. I wouldn't have believed it myself if anybody had told me."

"What is it? What are you talking about?" demanded Suzanne, her curiosity now aroused, in spite of her ill-humour.

"It is unaccountable," mused the head gunner, to all appearance lost in a sort of admiring wonder. "It is enough to make one wonder whether one is awake or only dreaming."

"But what is it you see?" cried the ship owner, no less impatiently than the housekeeper. "What are you talking about? Where must we look?"

"You see that cliff there to the left, don't you?"

"To the left?" asked the ship owner, ingenuously, "to the left of what?"

"To the left of the other, of course."

"What other?" demanded Suzanne, in her turn.

"What other? Why, don't you see that big white cliff that looks like a dome?"

"Yes," answered the ship owner.

"Well, what of it?" snapped Suzanne.

"Look, high up."

"High up, Segoffin?"

"Yes, on the side."

"On the side?"

"Yes, don't you see that bluish light playing on it?"

"Bluish light?" repeated the ship owner, squinting up his eyes and arching his hand over them to form a sort of shade.

"Yes, high up, near the top! The deuce take me if it isn't turning red now! Look, will you! Isn't it amazing? But come, M. Verduron, come, let's get a closer look at it," added Segoffin, seizing the ship owner by the arm and trying to drag him away.

"One moment," exclaimed M. Verduron, releasing himself from the head gunner's grasp, "to take a closer look at anything one must first have seen it at a distance, and the devil take me if I can see anything at all. And you, madame?"

"I don't, I am sure, monsieur."

Segoffin would perhaps have attempted to prolong the illusion by endowing the light with all the other colours of the rainbow, but the approach of another and even greater danger extinguished his inventive genius.

He heard Sabine's voice only a few feet from him, exclaiming:

"What are you all looking at, my dear Suzanne?"

"Mlle. Sabine!" Segoffin mentally exclaimed. "All is lost! Poor child! Such a revelation will kill her, I fear."

CHAPTER XVI.

SEGOFFIN'S RUSE.

On seeing Sabine, M. Floridor Verduron began his reverential evolutions all over again, and the girl returned his bows blushingly, for she had not expected to meet a stranger in the garden.

Segoffin, terrified at the thought that Cloarek's secret might be revealed at any moment, resolved to get the visitor away at any cost; so, interrupting him in the midst of his genuflections, he said:

"And now, M. Verduron, if you will come with me I will take you to monsieur at once."

"But my father has gone out, Segoffin," said Sabine.

"Never mind, mademoiselle, I know where to find him."

"But it would be much better for monsieur to wait for my father here, I think," insisted the girl. "He said he would soon be back, and if you go out in search of him you run a great risk of missing him, Segoffin, and of giving this gentleman a long walk for nothing, perhaps."

"No, no, mademoiselle, it is such a delightful day monsieur will enjoy a little walk, and I know a very pleasant road your father is sure to return by."

"But he might not return that way, Segoffin," interposed Suzanne, favourably disposed toward the visitor, by reason of his extreme politeness, and consequently anxious to enjoy his society as long as possible.

"But I tell you that —"

"My good friend," interrupted M. Verduron, "I must admit that I am too gallant, or rather not sufficiently unselfish, to debar myself of the pleasure of waiting here for the return of —"

"Very well, very well," interposed Segoffin, quickly, "we won't say any more about it. I thought mine would be the better plan; but it doesn't matter in the least, in fact, now I think of it, there is something particular that I want to speak to you about. I only ask two minutes of your time —"

"Two minutes, fair ladies!" exclaimed the visitor, laughing, "as if two minutes spent out of such delightful society was not two centuries of time."

"Ah, monsieur, you are really too kind," exclaimed Suzanne, bridling coquettishly in her delight at this new compliment.

"You will have to make up your mind to it, Segoffin," said Sabine, who was beginning to find M. Verduron very amusing.

"But I really must speak to you in private, monsieur, and at once," exclaimed the head gunner, greatly alarmed now.

"Come, come, my worthy friend, don't speak in such thunder tones, you will frighten these fair ladies," said M. Verduron, too anxious to exercise his fascinations upon the ladies to comply with Segoffin's request. "I will promise you a private audience after they have deprived us of the light of their presence, but not until then."

"But at least listen to what I have to say," insisted poor Segoffin, desperate now, and trying to get near enough to the visitor to whisper a few words in his ear.

But that gentleman hastily drew back with a loud laugh.

"No whispering in the presence of ladies, man! What do you take me for, a savage, a cannibal? This indis-

creet friend of mine seems to be resolved to ruin me in your estimation, my dear ladies."

"Oh, you have no idea how obstinate M. Segoffin is," remarked Suzanne. "When he once gets anything into his head there is no moving him."

The head gunner made no reply. Foiled in his efforts to get the visitor away, he now came a little closer to the trio, with the expression of a person who is prepared for the worst.

"So it is to Mlle. Cloarek that I have the honour of speaking," said the ship owner, gallantly, turning to Sabine.

"Yes, monsieur, and you, I understand, are one of my father's friends."

"He has no more devoted friend and admirer, I assure you, mademoiselle. I should be very ungrateful if I were not; I am under such great obligations to him."

"My father has been fortunate enough to render you some service, then, monsieur."

"Some service, mademoiselle? He has made my fortune for me."

"Your fortune, and how?" asked Sabine, much surprised.

"Why, mademoiselle," interrupted Segoffin, hastily, "it is in this gentleman's interest that your father has made so many — so many trips."

"That is true, mademoiselle," replied the ship owner, "and every one, almost without exception, has yielded rich returns."

"Yes, he is a great manufacturer," whispered Segoffin, edging in between Sabine and Suzanne. "We sell lots of goods for him during our trips."

"Then you are at least partially accountable for the anxiety which my father's frequent absences cause me, monsieur," remarked Sabine.

"And you have no idea how unreasonable mademoiselle is, monsieur," chimed in Suzanne. "She frets just

as much as if her father were really in some danger — "

"Some danger! Ah, my dear lady, you may well say — "

"Yes, it is astonishing how people deceive themselves," interrupted Segoffin, with great volubility. "Everybody thinks that everybody else has an easy time of it, and because a person makes a good deal of money, other people think he has only to stop and rake it up."

"Appearances are, indeed, very deceitful, my dear young lady," remarked the ship owner, "and though your father makes so light of the danger he incurs, I assure you that in the last fight — "

"Fight?" exclaimed the young girl, in astonishment; "fight?"

"What fight are you speaking of, monsieur?" asked Suzanne, in her turn, no less amazed.

"Why, a desperate fight, a fight to the death," whispered Segoffin, "with a merchant who didn't find our goods to his taste, but M. Cloarek and I finally succeeded so well in bringing him around to our way of thinking that he ended by taking a hundred pieces from us — "

"What on earth is the fellow talking about, my dear ladies?" cried M. Verduron, who had tried several times to interrupt Segoffin, but in vain. "Has my worthy friend gone stark, staring mad?"

"Mad!" exclaimed Segoffin, in a voice of thunder. Then advancing toward M. Verduron, he said, in threatening tones:

"You call me a madman, do you, you old rascal!"

For the fact is the head gunner, finding himself at the end of his resources, and despairing of averting the evil moment much longer, had resolved upon heroic measures; so, taking advantage of the amazement of the ship owner, who was very naturally stupefied by this sudden change of manner, Segoffin continued, in still more violent tones:

"Yes, you are an insolent old rascal, and if you try any more of your impudence on me, I'll shake you out of your boots."

"Segoffin, what are you saying, in Heaven's name?" cried Sabine, all of a tremble.

"What! you have the audacity to speak to me in this way, and in the presence of ladies, too!" exclaimed the ship owner.

"Take mademoiselle away from here at once," Segoffin said to Suzanne, *sotto voce*. "We are going to have a row, and it will be sure to throw her into a spasm. Get her away, get her away at once, I say."

Then, rushing upon the ship owner, and seizing him by the collar, he shouted:

"I've a great mind to hurl you down the cliff through that gap in the wall, you old bergamot-scented fop."

"Why, this poor man has gone stark, staring mad. Did any one ever see the like of it? What has happened to him?" stammered the amazed visitor.

"In God's name, take mademoiselle away!" thundered Segoffin, again turning to the housekeeper.

That lady, seeing Sabine turn pale and tremble like a leaf, had not waited to hear this injunction repeated before trying to lead Sabine to the house, but the young girl, in spite of her terror and the housekeeper's entreaties, could not be induced to leave the spot, deeming it cowardly to desert her father's friend under such circumstances; so, releasing herself from Suzanne's grasp, she approached the two men and cried, indignantly:

"Segoffin, your conduct is outrageous. In my father's name I command you to stop such scandalous behaviour at once."

"Help, help, he is strangling me!" murmured M. Verduron, feebly. "Ah, when the captain — "

The word captain sealed the ship owner's fate. In the twinkling of an eye Segoffin had seized M. Verduron around the waist, and had sprung with him over the low

parapet on to the grassy slope below, where, still locked in each other's arms, they rolled unharmed to the bottom of the cliff, while Sabine, unable to control the terror which this last incident had excited, swooned in Suzanne's arms.

"Help, Thérèse, help! Mademoiselle has fainted; help!" cried the housekeeper. The servant came running in answer to the summons, and with her assistance Sabine was carried to the house.

This call was heard by Segoffin, who at once said to himself: "There is no further cause for fear; our secret is safe!"

So he released his hold upon M. Floridor Verduron, who staggered to his feet, panting and dishevelled, and so angry that he was unable to utter a word, though his eyes spoke volumes. Segoffin, profiting by this silence, said to the ship owner, with the most good-humoured air imaginable, quite as if they were continuing a friendly conversation, in fact:

"Now, my dear M. Verduron, I will explain why I was obliged to force you to follow me to this rather lonely retreat."

"Wretch, how dare you insult me in this fashion?" yelled the ship owner, exasperated beyond endurance by the head gunner's coolness.

"It was all your fault, M. Verduron."

"My fault? How outrageous!"

"I asked you to give me a moment's conversation in private, but you wouldn't do it, so I was obliged to resort to this little manœuvre to secure it."

"Very well, very well, we will see what the captain says about all this. To place me in such a position, and in the presence of ladies!"

"I really ask your pardon for the liberty I took, M. Verduron," said Segoffin, seriously enough this time, "but upon my honour I was absolutely compelled to do it."

"What! you dare —"

"Listen to me. For several very important reasons M. Cloarek has carefully concealed from his daughter the fact that he has been engaged in privateering."

"Is that really so?" exclaimed the ship owner, his wrath giving place to profound astonishment. "Possibly that is the reason he took such pains to conceal his real name and address from me, then."

"Yes, and in order to explain his frequent absences he has given his daughter to understand that he sells dry goods on a commission, so you can understand my embarrassment when I saw you drop down upon us from the clouds."

"But why didn't you ask me to keep the secret?"

"That was what I wanted to speak to you in private about. After you refused, it was like treading on live coals to continue the conversation, and when I saw you were certain to let the cat out of the bag there was nothing for me to do but tumble you down the cliff to get you away from Mlle. Sabine and the housekeeper. It was pretty rough treatment, I admit, but I could see no other way out of the difficulty."

"I forgive you, Segoffin," said M. Verduron, magnanimously. "I must even admit that it was very clever of you to —"

"Where are they? Where are they?" shouted M. Cloarek's voice high above their heads.

"They both fell over the cliff, monsieur," replied the voice of Thérèse.

Almost immediately Yvon's head appeared above the parapet.

On seeing the ship owner, he stood a moment as if stupefied, then remembering that M. Verduron's presence imperilled the secret he was so anxious to guard, he exclaimed:

"Damnation! You here, monsieur! How dare you —"

But with three bounds Segoffin had reached the brow of the cliff.

"Don't be alarmed; Mlle. Sabine and Suzanne know nothing," he cried.

"Thank God! I can breathe again!" murmured Cloarek, relieved of a terrible apprehension.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE VOICE OF THE TEMPTER.

CLOAREK, reassured in regard to the probable consequences of the ship owner's visit, was anxious to ascertain the object of his coming, but it was first necessary to devise some way of helping him up the cliff, so Segoffin went in search of a rope. They threw one end of it to M. Verduron, and he soon made the ascent, thanks to its aid.

"Come in the house," said Cloarek, without making any attempt to conceal his annoyance. "I want to know why you ventured to come and search me out when I had taken such pains to conceal my identity."

"Well, to make a long story short, I came to hold a council of war with you."

"A council of war? Are you mad?"

"By no means, my brave captain, as you will profit by it to the extent of at least four or five hundred thousand francs."

"In other words, you want me to put to sea again, I suppose. But one question, here and now: What right had you to make a confidential letter that I wrote to you — what right, I say, had you to make such a letter public?"

"I thought it would give such pleasure to the many readers of the *Journal*, all of whom are hungering for news of the bravest and most renowned of privateers."

"You are very complimentary, I am sure, but this indiscretion on your part has annoyed me greatly."

"In that case your modesty will certainly suffer very much from the article in to-day's paper."

"What article? Let me tell you once for all —"

"Don't be alarmed, my dear captain. It merely described how the brave Captain l'Endurci conducted an attack, how like a tiger he fought, etc. It said nothing in relation to his private life."

"This is unbearable," said Cloarek, impatiently, though he was in reality greatly relieved.

"I was certainly actuated by no evil motive, in any event; besides, as Segoffin says, there is no undoing that which is done, or words to that effect."

"It is useless to discuss the matter further. You came here to ask me to put to sea again. I shall do nothing of the kind. That is the end of it."

"But it is not the end of it by any means, my dear captain. Just give me your attention for a moment. A three-master belonging to the East India Company, with two million francs in bullion, will soon be along. Two million francs, do you hear?"

"If she had ten millions aboard it would make no difference to me. I shall not put to sea again. I have said it, and I mean it."

"It is true that you have said so, my dear captain, but you will change your mind — for many reasons."

"I never go back on my word, monsieur."

"No more do I; but often, and in spite of ourselves, circumstances force —"

"Once again I tell you that I said no, and no it is."

"You said no, I admit! You will say yes, too, my dear captain," responded the ship owner, with an air of profound conviction.

"Enough, M. Verduron, enough!" cried Cloarek, stamping his foot, angrily.

"Don't irritate M. Yvon," Segoffin remarked to the ship owner, *sotto voce*. "I know him. You'll only bring down a terrific storm upon your head."

"All I ask, my dear captain," persisted M. Verduron, "is that you will give me your attention for five minutes, that is all."

"Go on, then."

"You will see by this clipping from an English newspaper, — and the sources of information seem to be perfectly trustworthy, by the way, — you will see that the British cruiser *Vanguard* which is convoying the richly laden vessel is commanded by Captain Blake."

"Captain Blake?"

"The same," replied the ship owner. "He is, as you know, one of the most daring officers in the British navy, and, unfortunately for us, he has always come off victorious in his encounters with our vessels."

"Oh, if I could only have been lucky enough to get a shot at him!" muttered Segoffin.

"You will, never fear, you old sea-wolf. As for you, my dear captain, your silence means consent, I am sure. Think of the honour, as well as the profit, to be derived from the operation: four or five hundred thousand francs and the *Vanguard* in tow of the *Hell-hound*, all in forty-eight hours."

Segoffin, who had been accustomed for years to make a profound study of his employer's physiognomy, and who had been carefully noting the effect of these proposals, said in a low tone to the ship owner, shaking his head the while:

"The bait is tempting, but he isn't going to swallow it this time."

His prognostications proved correct; the flush of anger gradually faded from Cloarek's face; his contracted features relaxed, and it was calmly, half-smilingly, that he at last said to M. Verduron:

"You are a clever tempter, but I have a talisman against you. It is the promise I have made to my daughter not to leave her again. You have seen her, and you must feel that I shall keep my word."

"Mlle. Cloarek is a charming girl. There is not the slightest doubt of that, my dear captain, but you would be very foolish to miss such a fine opportunity as this."

"It is impossible, I tell you."

"Help me persuade him, Segoffin, and then you will get your wished-for shot at Captain Blake, I promise you."

"Segoffin knows that I never break my word, M. Verduron. I said no, and no it is."

"*Sacre bleu!* it is amazing how atrociously selfish some people are!" exclaimed the ship owner, highly incensed by Cloarek's refusal.

"You must be jesting, M. Verduron," responded Cloarek, who could not help smiling at this outbreak. "It is all very easy for you to talk about stirring conflicts. I, for my part, should like to know which is the most selfish, you who remain safe and comfortable in your office at Dieppe, or the sailor who mans your ship, and exposes himself to all the perils of deadly combats."

"You talk as if I had to run no risk whatever," exclaimed Verduron. "You forget to say anything about the bullets I receive."

"Well, upon my word! I never knew before that you, too, were in the habit of exposing yourself to a shower of bullets!" cried Segoffin.

"Isn't my vessel under fire if I am not? And how about all the repairs, and all the damages your humble servant has to pay for? And the wounds, and the legs and arms, you have forgotten what they cost me, I suppose. Didn't I have to pay for five legs and three arms lost in that last fight of yours? Reckon them up at the rate of fifty crowns a limb, and see what they come to."

"But you must remember that you don't have to pay a sou when a man loses his head," retorted Segoffin.

"This is no subject for jesting, I want you to understand," snapped the ship owner, who was evidently

becoming more and more excited, "for am I not doing everything on earth to secure you the best of crews? For don't you think, yourself, captain, that the prospect of a small pension in case of serious injuries encourages our sailors and makes regular devils of them under fire? And yet when I am bleeding myself in this fashion, I am repaid by the blackest ingratitude."

"What you say is absurd," replied Cloarek, shrugging his shoulders. "I have quadrupled your fortune."

"And because Captain l'Endurci has made all the money he wants, he doesn't care in the least whether other persons have or not," persisted the ship owner.

"There is not the slightest need of your working yourself into such a passion, Verduron," replied Cloarek. "There are plenty of brave sea-captains in Dieppe, thank Heaven! quite as capable of commanding the *Hell-hound* and contending successfully with Captain Blake as I am."

"Then you refuse, captain?"

"For the tenth time, yes."

"Positively?"

"Positively."

"Very well, then, captain," responded the ship owner, resolutely. "What I have been unable to obtain by persuasion and entreaties, I shall obtain in some other way."

"What does he mean?" asked Cloarek, turning to Segoffin.

"I mean that it is not easy to resign oneself to the loss of at least half a million, captain," responded Verduron, threateningly; "so, though I had no idea that you would persist in your refusal, I was prudent enough to take my precautions."

"Your precautions?"

"The *Hell-hound* is now in Havre, where she arrived this morning."

"Then it was the *Hell-hound* I saw!" cried Segoffin. "I thought I couldn't be mistaken."

"The brig is at Havre?" exclaimed Cloarek.

"Yes, M. Yvon, but disguised beyond any possibility of recognition. She has been painted gray with a broad yellow band, and not a sign of a gun is visible."

"And now will you be kind enough to tell me what all this signifies?" demanded Cloarek.

"It means that I have changed the appearance of the brig as much as possible, because all the British cruisers are on the lookout for her, and now, thanks to this disguise, you will be able to reach Jersey with little or no trouble."

"You are persistent, I must say," said Cloarek, restraining himself only by a powerful effort.

"Yes, captain, and what is more, I've got you, and I mean to keep you. The crew are wild with enthusiasm; the prospect of another voyage under you has made them frantic with delight. They expect to see you this evening, and I warn you that if you are not in Havre within an hour, they will be here in two hours."

"What! You will dare —" began Cloarek, in a voice choked with anger.

"I? Why, I have nothing to do with it, captain. It is your sailors that you will have to deal with, and you have had a chance to find out whether they are milk-sops or not. If you persist in your refusal, you will see one hundred and fifty of those dare-devils here with drums and fifes, and resolved to have their brave captain, whether or no. I am afraid those drums and fifes will destroy your *incognito* effectually this time."

"Wretch!" roared Cloarek, realising how entirely feasible the ship owner's plan was, and he would have precipitated himself upon his tormentor if Segoffin had not suddenly interposed his own body between the two men and said to Cloarek:

"Remember that there are white hairs under his musk-scented powder, M. Yvon."

"Oh, knock me down! Kill me, if you like! that will

not prevent the crew from coming for you, nor you from going with them," snarled the ship owner.

"Don't talk so loud, gentlemen, I beg of you. I hear somebody coming now."

In another instant Suzanne appeared, pale and terrified.

"Oh, monsieur, — come, — come quick!" she cried.

"What is the matter?"

"Mademoiselle — "

"Is my daughter worse?"

"Oh, monsieur, I am so frightened, — come, come!"

Cloarek, forgetting everything else in his alarm, rushed off, leaving Segoffin and the ship owner alone together.

"M. Verduron, I tell you very plainly, you have had a narrow escape," said the head gunner. "I have only one piece of advice to give you. Get away from here as soon as possible."

"You may be right," replied the visitor, hastily picking up his hat and cane.

"I am right."

"Well, listen to me. You know I mean well, and I must admit now that I am sorry I tried to carry things with such a high hand, for I had no idea that the captain had a daughter, or that he was so anxious to conceal the fact that he was a privateer; but no power on earth now, not even that of the captain himself, can prevent those devilish sailors from coming here in search of him if he does not go to them, so you had better tell him, in any case, that the ship's officers and a part of the crew are waiting for him at the tavern known as The Golden Anchor on the quay."

The ship owner hastened off and Segoffin darted into the house to inquire if there was any improvement in Sabine's condition.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"MY MOTHER'S MURDERER STILL LIVES."

SEGOFFIN had been pacing the hall out of which Sabine's sitting-room opened for about half an hour with ever-increasing anxiety before Suzanne came out.

"Well, how is mademoiselle?" he asked, anxiously. "Tell me, Suzanne, how is she?"

"A nice question to ask, truly, when your brutality toward that estimable gentleman this morning threw mademoiselle into a frightful nervous spasm."

"I admit that I did very wrong, but she had got over that. M. Yvon told me so when he came out into the garden. What happened afterward to upset her so again?"

"Alas! the one great sorrow of her life has been recalled to her remembrance more vividly than ever!"

"You refer to her poor mother's death, of course."

"Yes, and she has just been talking to M. Yvon about it. You can judge how painful the conversation must have been to him."

"What do you mean?" cried Segoffin, in alarm. "Is it possible that Mlle. Sabine knows that terrible secret?"

"No, thank Heaven! she does not, and I sincerely hope she never will."

"I do not understand you then, Suzanne."

"This is what caused all the trouble," said the housekeeper, drawing a paper from her pocket.

"What is that?"

"The morning paper. It contains further details in

relation to that famous privateer, Captain l'Endurci. Listen to what it says, and you will then understand the situation."

And opening the paper, Suzanne read the following extract from an article headed, "Further Particulars in Relation to the Famous Corsair, Captain l'Endurci:"

"'The captain's personal appearance is well calculated to increase his prestige, and each and every one of his men would willingly follow him to the death.

"'This intrepid corsair is about forty years of age. Though only of medium height, he is remarkably agile and robust; his physiognomy is both virile and expressive; his eagle eye, the imperious carriage of his head, and his resolute bearing all show him to be a man born to command. His real name and origin is shrouded in mystery, but many persons are of the opinion that he is a native of Brittany, basing the supposition upon the costume he always wears on shipboard. Others think the captain came from some southern province, and that he adopted the Breton costume merely from motives of convenience.

"'However that may be, we are sure our readers will peruse with interest a description of the costume this famous corsair always wears on shipboard; in fact, it is even said that he attaches a superstitious importance to the wearing of this garb, which consists of a long black jacket and waistcoat trimmed with small silver buttons, a broad orange sash into which his weapons are thrust, wide white linen trousers similar to the *morphs* worn by the fishermen of Holland and the pilots of the island of Batz, high leggings, and a low, broad-brimmed felt hat.'"

After having read this extract the housekeeper remarked: "You see, Segoffin, that this corsair wears a costume which is identical in every respect with that worn by M. Cloarek on the night of madame's deplorable death."

"Yes; it makes me shudder to think of it," exclaimed

Segoffin, interrupting her, "and on reading it, I suppose Mlle. Cloarek fancied she saw in this corsair the mysterious personage who was the cause of her mother's death."

"Alas! yes, Segoffin, and she said to monsieur, in a sort of frenzy: 'Father, my mother's murderer still lives. Will you not avenge her?' You can imagine M. Cloarek's feelings. To undeceive his daughter he would have to accuse himself."

"Mademoiselle must have read the papers after M. Yvon's return, then, I suppose."

"Yes, monsieur came in about eleven o'clock. He looked radiant; my nephew, who was with him, also seemed to be in the best of spirits. 'Is my daughter in her room?' asked monsieur, gaily. 'I have some good news for her.' Though I am no talebearer, there was nothing for me to do but tell him about the altercation you and the worthy merchant had had in the garden, and how much it had terrified mademoiselle."

"Of course, but go on."

"Monsieur ran up to his daughter's room and found that she had almost entirely recovered from her attack. Soon afterward, Thérèse brought up the paper as usual, and I, unfortunately, thinking it would divert mademoiselle, gave it to her to read. When she came to the passage in which the privateer's peculiar costume was described, she uttered a terrible cry — But hush! here comes monsieur," exclaimed Suzanne, hastily.

Cloarek, with an expression of the gloomiest despair imprinted on his features, and as pale as death, had just come out of his daughter's room.

"Go to her, Suzanne, she is asking for you," he said, hoarsely. "Come with me, Segoffin."

Segoffin silently followed his employer into his bedroom, where Cloarek, throwing himself into an armchair, buried his face in his hands and groaned aloud.

On beholding this poignant grief, Segoffin felt his own

eyes grow moist as he stood silent and motionless beside his master.

"I can not understand how the recollection of that terrible night impressed itself so deeply on that unfortunate child's memory," exclaimed Cloarek, at last. "I shudder still as I think with what an expression of horror she exclaimed, 'Father, father, my mother's murderer still lives.' And as I gazed at her in a sort of stupor without replying, she added, with all the energy of intense hatred, 'Father, I tell you that the man who killed my mother, the man who killed your wife, still lives. Her murder cries for vengeance, and this man still lives.' And for the first time I saw an expression of hatred on my daughter's gentle face, and I was the object of that hatred. This terrible scene has reopened the wound again and revived my remorse, and yet you know how much I have suffered, and how bitterly I have expiated that momentary madness."

"But the worst thing, after all, is this scheme of Verduron's, M. Yvon," responded Segoffin, after a moment's silence.

"Yes, it is enough to drive one mad, for if I remain with my daughter the crew is sure to come here."

"That is absolutely certain. You know our men."

"Yes, and Sabine will then learn that her father, Captain l'Endurci, and her mother's murderer are all one and the same person, and this child, upon whom I have concentrated all my affection for years, — this child who is my only hope and joy and consolation in life, — will feel for me henceforth only aversion and loathing."

Then, after a few moments of gloomy reflection, he murmured, his eyes wild, his lips contracted in a sardonic smile:

"But nonsense! she is rich; she loves an honourable man, who loves her in return. She will still have Suzanne and Segoffin. Instead of loathing me, she shall mourn for me, and, so far as she is concerned, my

death shall be enshrouded in the same mystery as my life."

As he spoke Cloarek stepped toward a table on which a pair of pistols were lying; but Segoffin, who had not once taken his eyes off his employer, sprang forward and, seizing the pistols before the captain could reach them, removed the charge and coolly replaced the weapons.

"Wretch!" exclaimed Cloarek, seizing Segoffin by the collar, and shaking him violently, "you shall pay dearly for your audacity."

"Time presses, M. Yvon, and you have more important business on hand than shaking poor old Segoffin. Your time is too precious for that!"

The head gunner's coolness restored Cloarek to himself, and sinking despondently into a chair, he said, gloomily:

"You are right, I am a fool. What shall I do? My brain seems to be on fire."

"Do you really want to know what I think you had better do?"

"Yes."

"I think you had better go to Havre immediately."

"Leave Sabine in this condition? Increase her alarm by a hasty departure and an incomprehensible absence after all my promises to her? Abandon her when she needs my care and affection more than ever before, — at the time she is about to marry, in short?"

"Mlle. Sabine?"

"Yes, the idea of this marriage was not at all pleasing to me at first, but now I feel confident that my daughter's future will prove a happy one; still, I ought to guide these children and surround them with the tenderest paternal solicitude, and it is at a time like this that I must put to sea again, and again risk my life now that it has become more necessary than ever to Sabine. I have recovered my senses now, and realise how mad I was to think of killing myself just now.

Thanks to you, my tried and faithful friend, I have been saved from that crime."

"I wish I could save you from the visit of our ship's crew as well, M. Yvon. You must not forget that danger. If you do not go to them, they will surely come to you."

"Then I will go to them," exclaimed Cloarek, as if a way out of the difficulty had suddenly presented itself to his mind. "Yes, I will go to Havre at once, and tell my men that I have abandoned the sea, and that it will be useless for them to attempt to coerce me. You know how determined I am, and how little likelihood there is that I shall yield to overpersuasion. You shall accompany me. You have considerable influence over them, and you must exert it in my behalf. It is the only means of averting the danger that threatens me. It is now two o'clock, by three we shall be in Havre, and back home again by five. My daughter is lying down, and will not even suspect my absence. To avert suspicion, we will take a carriage at the inn."

Cloarek had already started toward the door, when the head gunner checked him by saying:

"You are making a great mistake in one respect, M. Yvon."

"What do you mean?"

"If you go to Havre you will not return here until after the cruise is ended."

"You are mad."

"No, I am not mad."

"You think my crew will carry me away by force, do you?"

"It is very probable. Besides, when you are with the sailors again, you will not have the strength to resist them."

"I will not?"

"No."

"Not after the reasons I have just stated to you? I

shall be back here by five o'clock, I tell you, and before my daughter has even discovered my absence. Your fears are absurd. Come, I say."

"You insist?"

"Yes, I do."

"That which is to be, will be," said Segoffin, shaking his head dubiously, but following his employer for all that.

After inquiring how Sabine was feeling, and learning that she had fallen asleep, Cloarek started for Havre in company with his head gunner.

CHAPTER XIX.

AFTER THE STORM.

THREE days have elapsed since Yvon Cloarek left his home without notifying his daughter of his intended departure, and this once pleasant and tranquil abode shows traces of recent devastation almost everywhere.

One of the out-buildings have been almost entirely destroyed by fire, and pieces of blackened rubbish and half-burned rafters cover a part of the garden.

The door and several windows on the ground floor, which have been shattered by an axe, have been replaced by boards; several large red stains disfigure the walls, and several of the sashes in the second story have been riddled with shot.

It is midnight.

By the light of a shaded lamp burning in one of the sleeping apartments, one can dimly discern the form of Onésime, and the sheets of the bed on which he is lying are stained with blood in several places.

Suzanne's nephew seems to be asleep. His face is death-like in its pallor, and a melancholy smile is playing upon his parted lips.

An elderly woman in peasant garb is sitting by his bedside, watching him with evident solicitude.

The profound silence that pervades the room is broken by the cautious opening and shutting of the door, and Dame Roberts steals on tiptoe up to the bed, and, drawing one of the curtains a little aside, gazes in upon her nephew with great anxiety.

In three days Suzanne's features have become almost unrecognisable, — sorrow, anxiety, and tears have wrought such ravages in them.

After gazing at Onésime in silence for several seconds, Suzanne stepped back, and, beckoning the attendant to come closer, said to her, in a whisper:

"How has he been since I went out?"

"He hasn't seemed to suffer quite as much, I think."

"Has he complained at all?"

"Very little. He has tried to question me several times, but I remembered your orders and would tell him nothing."

"He has recovered consciousness, then?"

"Entirely, madame. It is very evident that he would be glad enough to talk, if he could get any one to answer his questions."

"Has he asked for me?"

"Oh, yes, madame, he said to me several times: 'My aunt will be in soon, won't she?' I told him that you came in almost every half-hour. He made a slight movement of the head to indicate that he thanked me, and then he fell asleep, but only to wake with a start a few minutes afterward."

"He doesn't seem to suffer much from his wound now, does he?"

"No, madame, only he has had considerable difficulty in breathing once or twice."

"Heaven grant that his wound may not prove fatal!" exclaimed Suzanne, clasping her hands imploringly, and raising her tearful eyes heavenward.

"The surgeon assured you to the contrary, you know, madame."

"He told me that he had hopes of his recovery, that is all, alas!"

"I think he is waking, madame," whispered the peasant woman, for Onésime had just made a slight movement and uttered a deep sigh.

Suzanne peeped in again, and, seeing that Onésime was not asleep, she said to the peasant:

"Go down and get your dinner. I will ring for you when I want you."

The nurse left the room, and Suzanne seated herself in the chair the woman had just vacated.

On hearing his aunt's voice, Onésime looked greatly relieved; and when he saw her seat herself near him, he exclaimed:

"So you have come at last! How glad I am!"

"I heard you sigh just now, my dear boy, so you must still be suffering just as much or more, I fear."

"No; I feel much better."

"You are not saying that merely to reassure me, I hope."

"Take hold of my hand. You know how hot it was awhile ago."

"Yes, it is much cooler now, I see. And your wound, does it still trouble you much?"

"I have a little difficulty in breathing, that is all. The wound itself doesn't amount to much."

"Good Heavens! so a wound in the breast from a dagger is nothing, is it?"

"My dear aunt —"

"What do you want?"

"How is Mlle. Sabine?"

"Everybody is well, very well, as I've told you before."

"And M. Cloarek?"

"There is no use in asking me so many questions. I sha'n't answer them. By and by, when you are really better, it will be different."

"Listen, aunt. You refuse to answer me for fear of agitating me too much, but I swear to you that the uncertainty I am in concerning Mlle. Sabine and M. Cloarek makes me miserable."

"Everybody is getting on very well, I tell you."

"No, aunt, no, that is impossible, after the terrible and still inexplicable occurrence that — "

"But, my dear nephew, I assure you — Come, come, don't be so impatient. Can't you be a little more reasonable? Calm yourself, Onésime, I beg of you!"

"Is it my fault? Why will you persist in keeping me in such a state of suspense?"

"Don't I keep telling you that everybody is well?"

"But I tell you that is impossible," exclaimed the young man, excitedly. "What! do you mean to tell me that Mlle. Sabine, who starts and trembles at the slightest sound, could see her home invaded by a furious band of armed men, without sustaining a terrible, perhaps fatal, shock?"

"But, Onésime, listen to me — "

"Who knows but she may be dead, dead, and you are concealing it from me? You think you are acting for the best, aunt, but you are mistaken. The truth, no matter how terrible it may be, will do me much less harm than this state of frightful uncertainty. Sleeping and waking, I am a prey to the most terrible fears. I would a hundred times rather be dead than live in this state of suspense."

"Listen, then, but promise to be reasonable and have courage."

"Courage? Ah, I knew that some terrible calamity had occurred."

"Dear me! I knew it would be just this way whatever I said or did!" cried poor Suzanne. "You see yourself that at the very first word I say to you — "

"Oh, my God! I had a presentiment of it. She is dead!"

"No, no, she is living, she is living. I swear it! She has suffered terribly, — she has been alarmingly ill, but her life is no longer in danger."

"It has been in danger, then?"

"Yes, for two days, but I have just seen her and

talked with her, and there is no longer cause for the slightest anxiety."

"God be thanked!" exclaimed Onésime, fervently. "And how much I thank you, too, my dear aunt. Ah, if you knew how much good you have done me, and how relieved I feel. Is M. Cloarek here?"

"No."

"Where is he?"

"We do not know."

"But that fatal night—"

"He came home, and was slightly wounded in the fray, but no one has seen him since."

"And that strange attack upon the house, those frightful but incomprehensible words which were uttered by Mlle. Sabine, and which I seemed to hear as in a dream after I was hurt. These things puzzle me so. Explain them, I beg of you."

"In your present state of mind I can see that a refusal on my part might prove dangerous."

"Yes, very dangerous."

"But I repeat that you must have courage, for—"

"I will, aunt, I will."

"You remember, do you not, that on the afternoon of that memorable day, M. Cloarek, who had left for Havre without our knowing it, sent a message to his daughter from that city telling her that she must not be anxious about him, as some business matters might detain him until late that night? You recollect that, do you not?"

"Yes."

"You remember, too, the fright we had the very evening of M. Cloarek's arrival?"

"Yes, about those two men Thérèse thought she saw."

"The poor girl saw them only too plainly, as subsequent events have proved, for two men, as we afterward learned, did effect an entrance into the garden, not to break into the house, but to reconnoitre."

"The two men belonged to this armed band, then, I suppose."

"One of them was the leader of it."

Just then the nurse reëntered the room and motioned to Suzanne that she wished to speak to her.

"What is it?" inquired Suzanne, in a low tone.

"M. Segoffin has come."

"And M. Cloarek?"

"M. Segoffin is alone and wants to see Mlle. Sabine at once. Thérèse went up to tell her, and she sent word for him to come right up to her room."

"Tell mademoiselle that I will come at once if she needs me."

The nurse left the room again, and Suzanne returned to her nephew's bedside to continue her conversation with him.

CHAPTER XX.

THE MIDNIGHT ATTACK.

"It was no bad news that they came to tell you just now, was it, aunt?" inquired Onésime, as Suzanne reseated herself near him.

"Oh, no; I will tell you what it was presently. Let me go on with my story. You recollect Thérèse running in to tell us that the stable was on fire, and that a band of armed men were attacking the house?"

"Yes, yes; what a terrible night it was!"

"I shall never forget the mingled terror and admiration I felt at the courage you displayed. I can hear you saying now: 'Flight is impossible; I cannot preserve you from danger, my infirmity, alas! prevents that, but I can at least make a rampart of my body for your protection;' and, arming yourself with an iron bar wrenched from one of the shutters, you rushed to the door, and alone and unaided guarded the entrancé to the room with truly supernatural courage and strength."

"Don't speak of that, my dear aunt. Really, I—"

"What! not speak of it when the recollection of your bravery and devotion is the only consolation I have when I see you lying here. No, the most determined resistance I ever read of paled beside yours. Entrenched in the doorway, the iron bar became a formidable weapon in your hands, and though your defective vision prevented you from aiming your blows very accurately, those who came within reach of your arm fell at your feet, one by one."

"How terrified Mlle. Sabine must have been! Timid as she is, she must have died a thousand deaths during that brief struggle."

"You are very much mistaken, my friend. The courage and strength of character she displayed in that trying hour amazed me. I can see her now standing there pale but resolute. Her first words were: 'Thank God, I shall die alone, my father is absent.' Then, pointing to you, she said, exultantly: 'Do you admit that he is brave now? He is confronting death unflinchingly for our sakes, but we shall at least perish with him.' And when, overpowered, by numbers, you were at last struck down, and four of the men, the leader with his arm in a sling, burst into the room, she showed even greater heroism. 'Onésime is dead!' she exclaimed. 'It is our turn now! Farewell, Suzanne,' she added, clasping me in her arms, and murmuring, softly, 'Farewell, dear father, farewell.'"

"Loving and courageous to the last!" exclaimed Onésime, with tears both in his voice and eyes.

"I felt much less resigned. I had just seen you fall bleeding across the threshold, and I threw myself at the feet of the leader, begging for mercy. With a gesture he commanded the men to pause, and then, turning to me, demanded, in a threatening voice: 'Where is Captain l'Endurci?'"

"Captain l'Endurci?" repeated Onésime, in great surprise. "Why did they come here to look for Captain l'Endurci? Besides, these men were Englishmen. I remember now."

"I will explain presently. When the leader of the party asked where Captain l'Endurci was, I replied: 'This house belongs to M. Cloarek. He is absent from home. This is his daughter. Have pity on her.'

"'His daughter!' exclaimed the man, with a ferocious laugh. 'So this is his daughter, is it? So much the better! And you, — are you his wife?'

"'No, I am only the housekeeper.'

"'So this is his daughter,' he repeated again, approaching poor mademoiselle, whose courage seemed to increase with the danger, for, with both hands crossed upon her breast, like a saint, she looked the leader of the bandits straight in the eye.

"'Where is your father?' he demanded.

"'A long way from here, thank God!' replied the poor child, bravely.

"'Your father arrived here yesterday. He can hardly have gone away again so soon. He must be somewhere about the house. Where is he? Where is he, I say?'

"And as Sabine remained silent, he continued, with a sardonic smile:

"'I have missed your father, it seems, but, by taking you, I shall get him sooner or later. You shall write to him from England, telling him where you are, and he will incur any risk to release you. I shall be waiting for him, and so capture him sooner or later. Come with me.'

"'Go with you? I would rather die,' exclaimed Sabine.

"'No one has any intention of killing you, but you have got to come, so you had better do so peaceably, and not compel us to resort to force.'

"'Never!' cried the poor girl.

"The scoundrel turned to his men, and said a few words to them, whereupon they sprung upon Sabine. I tried to defend her, but they dragged me away, and, in spite of her tears and cries, she was soon securely bound. They had scarcely done this before the report of fire-arms and loud shouts were heard outside. Two men came rushing in, and said a few words to their leader, who quickly followed them out of the room. All the men except those who were holding Sabine hurried out after him. Then, and not until then, was I able to approach you. I thought at first that you were dead, so,

forgetting Sabine and everything else, I was sobbing over you, when, suddenly —" Suzanne paused for a moment overcome with emotion.

"Go on! Oh, go on, I beg of you!" exclaimed Onésime.

"Never shall I forget that scene. At the farther end of the room two of the wretches were trying to drag Sabine along, in spite of her despairing cries. The other two men, evidently frightened by the increasing uproar outside, darted to the door, but just as they reached it both were struck down in turn by a terrific blow from an axe. A moment afterward Sabine's captors shared the same fate."

"But who struck them down?"

"Who?" exclaimed Suzanne, with a shudder, and lowering her voice. "A man clad in a strange costume. He wore a long, black jacket and waistcoat, a broad-brimmed hat, and full, white trousers. Axe in hand, he had just burst into the room, followed by several sailors."

"It seems to me that I have heard Mlle. Sabine speak of some other man dressed in a similar manner who, she said, was her mother's murderer."

"Alas! this recollection was only too vivid in her mind," said Suzanne, sadly.

"But who was the man that came to Mlle. Sabine's assistance, clad in this way?"

"This man was the famous privateer, Captain l'Endurci, — this man was M. Cloarek!"

"M. Cloarek! Impossible!" exclaimed Onésime, raising himself up in bed, in spite of his weakness.

"Yes, he had an axe in his hand. His garments were covered with blood; his face, never, oh, never, have I beheld a face so terrible. When he came in, Sabine, not distinguishing his features at first, uttered a cry of horror, and exclaimed, 'The black man! The black man!' and when M. Cloarek ran to his daughter, she recoiled

in terror, crying, 'Father, ah, father, then it was you who killed my mother!' and fell apparently lifeless upon the floor."

"Yes, yes, those words, 'Father, then it was you who killed my mother,' I heard them vaguely, as life seemed to be deserting me. Oh, this is frightful, frightful! What a horrible discovery! What misery it entails! Such a tender father and loving daughter to have such a gulf between them for ever! You were right, aunt, you were right! It does indeed require courage to bear such a revelation. And Mlle. Sabine, how has she been since that time?"

"The unfortunate child lay between life and death for two whole days, as I told you."

"And M. Cloarek?"

"Alas! we know nothing about him. On hearing his daughter reproach him for her mother's death, he uttered a loud cry, and rushed out of the room like one demented, and nothing has been seen of him since."

"How unfortunate! Great Heavens, how unfortunate! But how did M. Cloarek hear of this intended attack?"

"It seems this party had made two or three similar descents at different points along the coast; but this attack was unquestionably made in the hope of capturing M. Cloarek, who, under the name of Captain l'Endurci, had inflicted such injury upon the British navy."

The nurse, reëntering the room at that moment, said to Suzanne:

"Madame Roberts, M. Segoffin wishes to speak to you, as well as to M. Onésime, if he feels able to see him."

"Certainly," responded the young man, promptly.

Segoffin entered the room almost immediately. Dame Roberts did not receive him with ironical words and looks, as she had been wont to do, however. On the contrary, she advanced to meet him with affectionate eagerness.

"Well, my dear Segoffin, is your news good or bad?" she exclaimed.

"I hardly know, my dear Suzanne. It will all depend upon this," he sighed, drawing a bulky envelope from his pocket as he spoke.

"What is that?"

"A letter from M. Cloarek."

"He is alive, then, thank Heaven!"

"Yes, and his only remaining hope is in this letter, and I am to give the letter to you, M. Onésime."

"To me?"

"And I am to tell you what you are to do with it. But first let me ask if you feel able to get up?"

"Yes, oh, yes!" exclaimed the young man, making a quick movement.

"And I say you are not. It would be exceedingly imprudent in you, Onésime," cried his aunt.

"Excuse me, Suzanne," interposed Segoffin. "I am as much opposed to anything like imprudence as you can possibly be, but (I can confess it now, you see) as I have had considerable experience in injuries of this kind during the last twelve years, I am probably much better able to judge than you are, so I am going to feel your nephew's pulse and note his symptoms carefully, and if I find him able to go down to the parlour where Mlle. Sabine is, I— No, no, not so fast!" added Segoffin, laying a restraining hand on Onésime, who, upon hearing Sabine's name, had evinced an evident intention of springing out of bed. "I have not made my diagnosis yet. Do me the favour to keep quiet. If you don't, I will take the letter away, and lock you up here in your room."

Onésime sighed, but submitted with breathless impatience to Segoffin's careful examination, made with the aid of a lamp held by Suzanne, an examination which satisfied him that the young man could sit up an hour or two without the slightest danger.

"You are positive there is no danger, Segoffin?" asked Dame Roberts, anxiously.

"None whatever."

"But why not postpone this conference for awhile?"

"Because there is a person counting the hours, nay, the very minutes, until he hears from us."

"You mean M. Cloarek, do you not?"

"I tell you there is some one not far from here to whom this decision means life or death," said Segoffin, without answering the question.

"Life or death!" cried Suzanne.

"Or rather hope or despair," added Segoffin, gravely, "and that is why, Suzanne, I ask your nephew to make the effort to go down-stairs. Now, if you will go to mademoiselle, I will help M. Onésime dress."

Ten minutes afterward Onésime, leaning on Segoffin's arm, entered the little parlour where Sabine was awaiting him.

CHAPTER XXI.

A LAST APPEAL.

THE poor girl was as pale as death, and so weak that she was obliged to half recline in a large easy-chair.

"Will you sit down, M. Onésime, and you too, my dear Suzanne and Segoffin," she said, with gentle dignity.

They all seated themselves in silence.

"Before beginning this conversation," said Sabine, with a melancholy smile, "I must tell you that I am greatly changed. The vague and often senseless fears which have haunted me from infancy seem to have vanished. The terrible reality seems to have dispelled these phantoms. I tell you this, my friends, so you may understand that it is no longer necessary to manifest so much caution and consideration in your treatment of me, and that you can tell me the entire truth with safety, no matter how terrible it may be. One word more: I adjure you, Suzanne, and you too, Segoffin, in the name of your devotion to me and to — other members of my family, to answer all my questions fully and truthfully. Will you promise to do this?"

"I promise," replied Suzanne.

"I promise," said Segoffin.

A brief silence followed.

All present, and more especially Onésime, were struck by the firm and resolute manner in which Sabine expressed herself, and felt that, whatever her decision might be, it would unquestionably prove unalterable.

"You saw me born, Suzanne," continued the young

girl, after a moment, "and by your untiring care and faithful devotion you made yourself my mother's valued friend. It is in the name of this friendship that I adjure you to tell me if the memories of my infancy have deceived me, and if it was not my father who, twelve years ago, dressed as I saw him three days ago, caused — caused my mother's death."

"Alas! mademoiselle —"

"In the name of my sainted mother, I adjure you to tell me the truth, Suzanne."

"The truth is, mademoiselle," replied the housekeeper, in a trembling voice, "the truth is, that, after a stormy scene between your parents, madame died; but —"

"Enough, my dear Suzanne," said Sabine, interrupting her. Then, passing her hand across her burning brow, she relapsed into a gloomy silence that no one dared to break.

"Segoffin," she said, at last, "you were my grandfather's faithful servant and trusted friend. You watched over my father in childhood; at all times, and under all circumstances, you have been blindly devoted to him. Is it true that my father, instead of being engaged in business as he said, has been privateering under the name of Captain l'Endurci?"

"Yes, mademoiselle, it is true," Segoffin answered, smothering a sigh.

After another brief silence, Sabine said:

"M. Onésime, I owe it to myself and I owe it to you to inform you of my determination. In happier days there was some talk of a marriage between us, but after what has occurred, after what you know and have just heard, you will not be surprised, I think, to hear me say that this world is no longer any place for me."

"Good Heavens! what do you mean, mademoiselle?" cried Onésime, in dismay.

"I have decided to retire to a convent, where I intend to end my days."

Onésime did not utter a word, but sat with his head bowed upon his breast, while quick, heavy sobs shook his frame.

"No, mademoiselle, no! That is impossible," sobbed Suzanne. "No, surely you will not thus bury yourself alive."

"My mind is made up," answered Sabine, firmly; "but if such a sojourn does not seem too gloomy to you, my dear Suzanne, I should be glad to have you accompany me."

"I shall never leave you. You know that very well, mademoiselle, but you will not do this, you will not—"

"Suzanne, for two days I have been reflecting upon the course I ought to pursue. There is nothing else for me to do, so my resolution is irrevocable."

"And your father, mademoiselle," interposed Segoffin, "before you separate yourself from him for ever you will surely see him once more."

"No."

"Then, from this day on, you are dead to him and he is dead to you."

It was evidently with a violent effort at self-control that Sabine at last replied:

"It will be better for me not to see my father again until we are reunited with my mother."

"Ah, mademoiselle, how can you be so cruel?" murmured Segoffin, despairingly. "If you knew how wretched he is—"

"No, I am not cruel," replied the girl; "at least I do not mean to be. I can only repeat what I said to Suzanne just now. For two days I have been reflecting on the course I ought to pursue, and my decision is irrevocable."

A gloomy silence greeted this announcement. Segoffin was the first to speak.

"You surely will not refuse to hear a letter from M. Cloarek read, mademoiselle," he said, at last. "It

is the only request he makes of you, for he foresaw the aversion you would feel for him."

"Aversion!" cried Sabine, like one in mortal agony. Then controlling herself, she added:

"There seems to have been a strange and cruel fatality about all this."

"Yes," answered the old servant, sighing; "but as M. Cloarek is never to see you again, will you not at least listen to the letter I brought to M. Onésime?"

"It is undoubtedly my duty to comply with my father's wishes, so I am ready to listen, M. Onésime."

The young man opened the envelope Segoffin handed him. The letter which Cloarek had written to his daughter was accompanied with the following brief note:

"I implore you to read the enclosed letter to Sabine, my dear Onésime. It is a last proof of esteem and affection I desire to give you.

"May this truthful account written by a despairing parent, and read by a beloved voice, reach his daughter's heart. Yours affectionately,

"Y. CLOAREK."

After telling Sabine the contents of this note the young man read the following aloud:

"'To MY DAUGHTER: — Fate seems to decree that I am to be separated from you for ever, my child, for now I know you can no longer bear the sight of me.

"'A strange and unforeseen event has revealed a terrible and jealously guarded secret to you.

"'Yes, that man in the strange costume, whom you have always remembered as your mother's murderer, was I, your father.

"'The privateer whose deeds inspired you with such horror was I.

"'Your mother was *enceinte*. We had a quarrel,—the first in our whole married life, I swear it! I gave way to my temper, and my anger became so terrible that, in your mother's nervous condition, her fright killed her.

"'Mine was a double crime, for the terror that proved fatal to your mother also had a lasting effect upon you, for the unfortunate impression made upon you at that tender age had a most deplorable influence, not only upon your health, but upon your whole life.

"'You know my crime, now let me tell you how I have expiated it.

"'When I saw you motherless, I asked myself what would become of you.

"'The small fortune that your mother and I possessed had been almost entirely lost in consequence of the political agitations of the day and a ruinous lawsuit. I had lost my position as a magistrate in consequence of the scandal which my ebullitions of temper caused.

"'I sold the small amount of property I had left, and realised about six thousand francs from the sale. Suzanne, who had gained your poor mother's affectionate esteem by her virtues and her faithfulness, was devoted to you. I said to her:

"'"Here are five thousand francs; enough, with economy, to supply my daughter's wants and yours for five years. I entrust my child to your care. If you have seen or heard nothing from me at the expiration of these five years, you will send a letter which I will leave with you to the person to whom it is addressed."

"'The person to whom this letter was written was a man of noble lineage whose life I had saved during the revolution, and who had taken up his abode in Germany; and I felt sure that this man, who was still wealthy, would treat you as an adopted child; but I did not intend you to eat the bitter bread of dependence if I could help it.

"'These arrangements made, I kissed you while you

were peacefully sleeping, and departed with one thousand francs as my only dependence. Segoffin, my tried and trusted friend, insisted upon sharing my fortunes, so he accompanied me.

"'I had devoted the days which immediately preceded my departure to sorrowful meditations upon the future and the past, during which I had questioned, studied, and judged myself with inexorable severity.

"'My misfortunes and my crime toward your mother were due to the impetuosity of my character. Anything that wounded my feelings, anything contradictory to my convictions, anything in the way of opposition to my wishes, made my blood boil and excited me almost to frenzy; and this exuberance and impetuosity vented themselves in fury and violence.

"'In short, my only capital was anger.

"'While thus studying myself I recollected the wonderful mental and physical power with which I seemed to be endowed when I yielded to these transports of rage.

"'Often when I had revolted against certain iniquitous facts or acts of cruel oppression, the very intensity of my anger had given me almost superhuman power to defend the weak and chastise the oppressor. For instance, one day when I found three ruffians attacking a poor defenceless woman, I nearly killed all three of them, though in my normal condition I could not have coped successfully with any one of them single-handed.

"'But alas! my child, on continuing this inexorable study of myself, I was also obliged to admit that I had not always had just cause for my anger, by any means, for not unfrequently the slightest contradiction infuriated me almost to madness. Your poor mother's death was a terrible example of this idiosyncrasy on my part.

"'After this long and careful examination of myself, I summed up the result as follows:

"'Anger is a passion of such intensity in me, that it increases my mental and physical powers a hundredfold. In other words, it is a force.

"'When this force is brought into action by generous motives, it leads to acts of which I have every reason to be proud.

"'When, on the contrary, it is brought into action by unworthy motives, it causes me to commit culpable or even criminal acts, which I shall never cease to regret.

"'Anger has been the cause of my ruin and of my despair. It killed my wife. Now, anger shall be my salvation and the salvation of my daughter.

"'These words may seem incomprehensible to you, my child, but listen.

"'In my position of magistrate, my proneness to anger and violence was most prejudicial to me. It caused people to regard me with derision, even with contempt, and destroyed every prospect of my advancement in my judicial career. In other words, my mind, character, and temperament did not harmonise with my functions.

"'It was consequently advisable for me to adopt a profession in which the vice, or rather, the radical force of my nature could be utilised to the best advantage of myself and of others.

"'I soon found such a profession.

"'My grandfather had been a sea-faring man, like nearly all Bretons who live on the coast; but my father's rather delicate health led him to enter the judiciary. But I had been reared on the coast, and the sight of the sea, and the daring, adventurous, and independent life of the fishermen had made a deep impression upon my mind.

"'A privateer! to be a privateer! When this idea presented itself to my mind my heart bounded with hope.

"'It seemed to amount to a revelation.

"'It offered an outlet for the feverish ardour that was devouring me.

"'My one object in life now was to save you from poverty, and ensure you the comforts of life, both now and in years to come, — to secure sufficient wealth to make it possible for you to marry the man of your choice, some day. This, and to find a career in which my powers could be best utilised.

"'How could I do this more effectually than by becoming a privateer?

"'The prize-money gained by privateers often amounts to large sums, so it was quite possible that I might succeed in amassing a very comfortable little fortune for you; besides, where could I hope to find a life that would suit me better, or even as well as the daring, exciting, adventurous life of a corsair?

"'Contention and strife were like the breath of life to me. Resistance exasperated me to frenzy; peril only incited me to greater efforts; the presence of danger set my blood to boiling. Madness seized me, and my capabilities seemed to increase in power in proportion to the number of my enemies.

"'Nor was this all, my child. As I have remarked before, cruelty, or oppression, or treachery, enraged me well-nigh to madness, and against whom should I fight if I became a corsair? Against a country I abhorred, — against a country that, impelled by hatred, greed, or ambition, as the case might be, had pursued France with the utmost vindictiveness for years, hesitating at nothing, — now trying to ruin us by flooding our country with counterfeit assignats, now torturing our brave soldiers to madness, even to death, in her horrible prison hulks, — in short, *England!*

"'*England!* In spite of the despair that overwhelms me as I write, the mere name of that country (which I hate with an even more mortal hatred since the dastardly attempt of which you so narrowly escaped becom-

ing the victim) brings a hot flush of anger to my cheek; my wrath kindles again, and —

"'But forgive me, forgive me, my poor child, forgive me for thus grieving your tender and ingenuous heart, which is incapable of aught like hatred.

"'I did feel it necessary, however, to explain all the reasons that actuated me in entering upon the only career that seemed open to me.

"'My decision made, I kissed you farewell while you were sleeping, and departed in company with Segoffin.'"

Onésime's reading was here interrupted by a despairing sob that Sabine could no longer repress.

CHAPTER XXII.

CONCLUSION.

SABINE had been deeply touched by the opening paragraphs of her father's letter.

Cloarek's simple and straightforward confession, his deep remorse at the ebullition of temper which had been the cause of his wife's death, his resolve to expiate his faults, or, rather, to make them assist in ensuring his daughter's future happiness, the paternal love which dominated every word and deed, all combined to arouse a feeling of tender commiseration for misfortunes which had been due, in a great measure, at least, to peculiarities of temperament; and seeing the strong impression that had been made on the young girl, the others saw a ray of hope.

Segoffin and the housekeeper exchanged inquiring glances, but seemed to silently agree that it would be advisable to make no comment, but leave Sabine to the influence of her own reflections.

But after a few moments, Suzanne, leaning toward her nephew, whispered in his ear:

"All is not lost yet. Go on, go on, my dear Onésime." So Onésime continued as follows:

"'Segoffin and I went to Dieppe, where we shipped as common sailors on a privateer, for we realised that we must both serve an apprenticeship at our new trade. We made several voyages in that capacity. In my

leisure moments I studied mathematics and the art of navigation assiduously, so I should be able to command a vessel myself when the necessary practical knowledge had been acquired.

"'My apprenticeship lasted two years, during which we were engaged in a number of bloody conflicts. At the end of that time I was offered the position of mate aboard a well-known privateer. After eighteen months spent in this way, I had become so well known that a ship owner offered me the command of a vessel called the *Hell-hound*, that he was fitting out.

"'Strange to say, I was never wounded, though I took part in so many desperate conflicts. I received my first wound on coming to your assistance the other night.

"'I dare not tell you the cause to which I attribute this singular immunity from danger. I should be obliged to mention your mother's name, and that would revive your grief, and possibly it is only a superstitious fancy, after all.

"'Fate has not been equally kind to Segoffin, unfortunately. He has received several wounds, and, in boarding a vessel during our last fight, he lost an eye by a blow from a pike. No words could do justice to this worthy man's wonderful devotion. I no longer regard him as a servant, but as a friend.

"'One more brief explanation, my child.

"'I knew your affection for me. I knew, too, that your nervous system had received a severe shock at the time of your poor mother's death, so I resolved to save you from constant anxiety by concealing my real occupation from you. So it was agreed between Segoffin and me that we should explain our frequent absences by pretending that we were travelling around the country selling dry goods. I also arranged that the letters you sent to the different towns agreed upon should be forwarded to Dieppe.

"'When I returned after a cruise, I got these letters,

and dated my replies from different towns, where I had previously arranged to have them mailed.

"'Such were some of the many precautions that I was obliged to take to conceal the truth from you and allay any suspicions that might be excited in your mind.

"'Forgive these deceptions. They seemed to me necessary. That excuse will, I am sure, avail me.

"'Two years ago the doctors assured me that the sea air would be very beneficial to you, so I purchased our present home and established you in it. Our home being a long way from Dieppe, the port from which I usually sail, my secret has been carefully guarded, up to this time, thanks to my assumed name, Captain l'Endurci, and neither you nor Suzanne have ever suspected that the famous corsair, whose bloody exploits so excited your horror, was your father, Yvon Cloarek.

"'And now, my darling child, you know all. I have not made this confession with any hope of changing your resolution; I can see that my presence will henceforth be extremely painful to you, but I could not leave you for ever without removing the veil of mystery that has enshrouded my conduct up to the present time.

"'And now, farewell, and for ever, my beloved daughter.

"'My only consolation is the thought that your future happiness is well-nigh certain. You love, and you are loved in return by a generous and noble-hearted man; Suzanne will be another mother to you, and I leave you my good and faithful Segoffin.

"'My notary has received full instructions in relation to your marriage contract. I wish your marriage to take place on the first of next month, so I may be with you in thought on that happy day.

"'Once more farewell, my idolised daughter. The tears are falling so fast, that I cannot see to write any more.

"'Your father, who loves you as he has always loved you, YVON CLOAREK.

"'Segoffin will tell you the cause of my hasty departure for Havre, and how I happened to return in time to rescue you from the wretches who were dragging you away."

When the reading of this letter was concluded, Sabine, who was very pale and who seemed to be deeply moved, buried her face in her hands, and sobbed softly.

Segoffin exchanged another meaning look with Suzanne, and then, reconquering his own emotion, said:

"Now, mademoiselle, with your permission, I will tell you how M. Yvon got here in time to save you."

And Sabine making no reply, the head gunner continued:

"That powdered gentleman, who was here the other day, Mlle. Sabine, was the owner of our vessel. He came to try to persuade M. Yvon to make another voyage. He had heard of a vessel laden with two millions in gold, that would soon be along, and offered us a chance of a stirring fight besides; but M. Yvon had promised you he would not leave you again, so he refused, whereupon the ship owner told your father that the ship's crew would certainly come for him, and take him away with them, whether or no. In order to prevent any such proceeding as that, which would have let the cat out of the bag, so far as you were concerned, we hurried off to Havre. Most of the crew were at a tavern there. They greeted M. Yvon with the wildest enthusiasm and delight, for he is as tenderly loved by these rough corsairs as he is by the members of his own family; for though he can be severe, if need be, he is also just and humane. There is more than one English captain, mademoiselle, whom M. Yvon has captured and then set free with all his personal belongings. And do you know why? Because

the first question your father always asked a prisoner was, 'Have you a daughter?'

"If he answered in the affirmative," continued Segoffin, "he was all right, for, as M. Yvon often said to me, 'I love my little Sabine too much to hold a man who has a daughter, a prisoner.'

"So Mlle. Sabine, you have made many a father and daughter happy in England, without even suspecting it. But excuse me, I had almost forgotten what I started to tell you. Well, though the sailors were so glad to see your father again, they got very angry when they found out that he had no intention of going to sea again, and there was no such thing as inducing them to listen to reason. I have seen M. Yvon in a great peril many a time, but never did I see him show such courage as he did the other day, when he refused what would have been the crowning glory of his maritime career, and why? 'Because I have given my daughter my word,' he said. But this was not all. His refusal so infuriated the crew that some of them even went so far as to hint that if your father refused, it was because he was afraid to fight the famous English captain. He, M. Yvon, afraid! After that, Mlle. Sabine, he said to me, in a low tone, and with a melancholy smile that I shall never forget:

"'My affection for my daughter has been really put to the test for the first time in my life, and now I know that there is not a father in the world who loves his child more than I do.'"

"Go on, go on, Segoffin," pleaded Sabine, evidently deeply moved.

"When they ventured to accuse M. Yvon of cowardice, he coldly replied that his mind was made up, and that it was useless for them to insist further. A scene of the wildest excitement followed, and some of the men shouted: 'Let us take the captain, whether or no. The first mate can navigate the vessel, and when the captain sees the enemy, he'll change his mind fast enough.'

CONCLUSION.

"They were all so excited that I don't know how the affair would have ended, had not an officer of the fort, who knew that the captain of the *Hell-hound* was at the tavern, come rushing in to tell M. Yvon that a fishing-smack had just come in and reported that a suspicious-looking schooner had been sighted from the cliffs, and that appearances seemed to indicate her intention of making a landing, as had been done at several other points along the coast. There being no war-ship in the harbour the officer came to implore the captain of the *Hell-hound* to go out and attack the schooner if she made any attempt to land. M. Yvon could not refuse, as it was in defence of his country that he was requested to give his services. We were soon aboard the brig; the wind was favourable, we weighed anchor, and were soon flying along in search of the schooner. Right here, Mlle. Sabine, I must tell you something that M. Yvon dared not confess in his letter. He speaks, you know, of a superstitious idea he had in connection with his never having been wounded. You must understand, Mlle. Sabine, that your poor father's life has been divided as it were into two parts, — one supremely happy, the part spent at home or in talking with me about you; the other desolation itself, the hours spent in thinking of your poor dear mother, whom he loved even more tenderly than he loves you, as Suzanne has told you a hundred times. The night she died, it so happened that he had dressed himself in Breton costume to attend a fancy dress ball. Being very young at the time, you did not recognise him. After this calamity, when we shipped as common sailors on a privateer where every one dressed as he pleased, M. Yvon said to me: 'As I am here to expiate a crime I shall regret all my life, I intend always to wear the costume of my native province at sea. It has become sacred to me, as I wore it on the fatal night when I held my poor dying wife in my arms for the last time.'

"M. Yvon has kept his word ever since, in spite of my entreaties, for it having been reported in England that the famous corsair, Captain l'Endurci, wore the Breton costume, it was at M. Yvon that every one aimed. But though your father exposed himself so much more than any of the rest of us, he was never wounded, and as there is a superstitious streak in the composition of every human being, M. Yvon finally began to think that there must be a protecting charm attached to our national costume. The sailors, too, imagined that this costume brought the ship good luck. At least, they would have felt much less confident of success if M. Yvon had commanded them in any other garb, so that is why M. Yvon, when he went aboard to go out and fight the schooner, put on the costume of his native province exactly as he would have put on a uniform, not supposing for an instant that there was any likelihood of his going to his own home.

"We had been sailing around about three-quarters of an hour, when all at once we saw a bright light stream up on the coast above the cliffs. A careful scrutiny convinced the captain that the house where we lived was on fire; and almost at the same moment, the first mate, with the aid of a night telescope, discovered the schooner riding at anchor, with all her boats at the foot of the cliff where the English had doubtless landed. The captain ordered the long-boat lowered, and sprang into it in company with me and twenty picked men. We reached the scene of action in a quarter of an hour. M. Yvon received his first wound while striking down the leader of the bandits, a Captain Russell, who figured so prominently in the abduction of M. Yvon a short time ago. Wounded by your father and left a prisoner at Dieppe, he had nevertheless managed to make his escape and concoct this new conspiracy. This, Mlle. Sabine, is the whole truth with regard to M. Yvon. He has suffered, oh, how he has suffered these three last days! and this is

nothing to what he will suffer up to the time of your marriage; but after that, when he knows you are happy, I fear that he can endure it no longer. No human being could and —"

"My father, where is my father?" cried Sabine, trembling with grief, anxiety, and long repressed tenderness.

"Really, mademoiselle, I do not know that I ought —"

"My father, is he here?" repeated the girl breathlessly.

"He is not very far off, perhaps," replied Segoffin, nearly wild with joy; "but if he returns, it must be never to leave you again."

"Oh, can he ever forgive me for having doubted his love and his nobility of soul for one moment? If he will, all the rest of my life shall be devoted to him. My God! you are silent, you are all weeping — you are all looking toward that room as if my father were there. Thank Heaven! my father is there!" cried Sabine, her face radiant with inexpressible joy as she ran toward the door leading into the next room.

The door suddenly opened, and in another instant father and daughter were locked in each other's arms.

One month afterward, a double marriage united Suzanne and Segoffin, Sabine and Onésime.

The famous Doctor Gasterini, equally celebrated as a gourmand and as a physician, had restored Onésime's sight.

On returning from the church, Segoffin remarked to Suzanne with a triumphant air:

"Ah, well, my dear, was I not right in telling you that, 'what is to be, will be?' Haven't I always predicted that you would be Madame Segoffin some day? Are you, or are you not?"

"Oh, well, I suppose one must make the best of it,"

responded Madame Segoffin, with a pretended sigh, though she really felt as proud of her husband as if he had been one of the heroes of the *Grande Armée* she was so fond of raving about. "There's no help for it, I suppose, as 'that which is done cannot be undone.'"

THE END.

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